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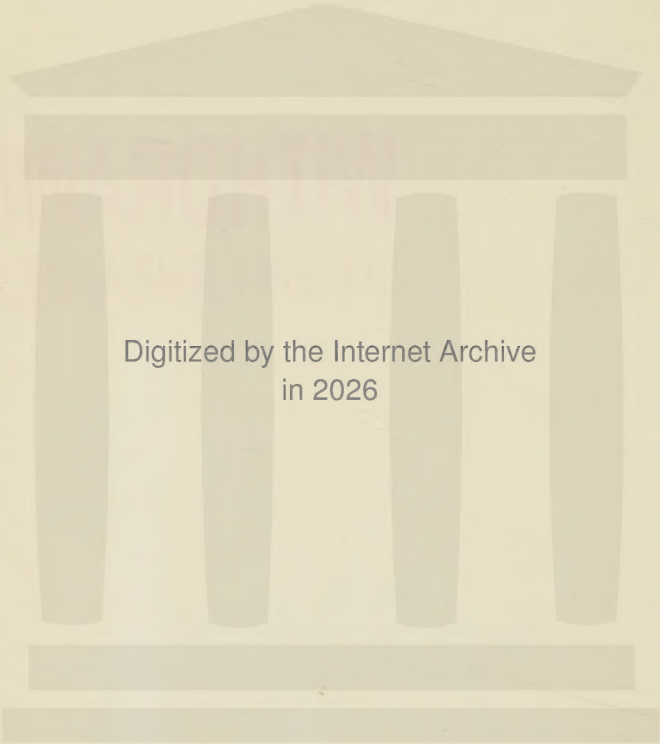

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REDDER BLOOD

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REDDER BLOOD

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM M. ASHBY

NEW YORK

THE COSMOPOLITAN PRESS

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REDDER BLOOD

A WORD, PLEASE

Whoever reads this story must remember that it does not advocate miscegenation nor does it hint at the justification of intermarriage between the races except on a sentimental basis, and whoever interprets it otherwise reads into the story that which is not there.

The book does say, however,—and, I hope, strongly,—that where two persons love each other deeply neither custom, nor convention, nor law are great enough barriers to keep them apart, else we should never have had an Othello and a Desdemona.

Prohibitive legislations are not the best means to promote moral growth, for where attraction is strong, even in the face of law, subterfuges and illicit dealings abound very greatly.

THE AUTHOR.

REDDER BLOOD

I

The most prominent and respected man in New York twenty-five years ago was Stanton Birch. He was thirty-four, and he possessed a mind, good looks, and riches.

There was nothing with which he was not conversant, and concerning many things he had a profound knowledge. Art, history, science, invention, fiction, women—with all these things he was more or less familiar. If he had entered any of the several clubs of which he was a member,—the Albion, the Gilbo, the East End Athletic,—while a controversy was going on in which neither participant was willing to admit that he was wrong, they would have exclaimed, "Here's Birch; let him settle the dispute." And so much did they honor him that whatever he said was accepted *ex cathedra* and the disputations ended.

Yet he was not a "man of the world."

He knew women and liked them; but he detested the mothers that were ever sending him invitations in order "to catch" him because he was unmarried, unrelated, and wealthy.

He did not even care for their "Join us tonight at Wallack's, Box I," to see Modjeska, Ellen Terry, MacCullough, or Jefferson. The invitations generally came from persons who were narrow, devoid of artistic sense, or unappreciative. He sometimes accepted them, however, because he was sociable, and he could not ignore kindnesses even though they were often shams or subterfuges.

There was not a charity organization in New York that had not his name on the list of its contributors, and he always responded to such appeals with liberal donations.

But his pastime and his hobby were horses, and the trainer and owner of the most fashionable riding-school in the city said that he was the best horseman he had ever seen.

He was a striking figure one bright morning late in November as he rode down Fifth Avenue on his superbly caparisoned Arabian mare and turned at Seventy-second Street into Central Park.

The air had in it a crispness that was enlivening, a freshness that was energy-creating. With her head high in the air, her eyes spirited, her ears vacillating, and her step lively, the mare might easily have had her prototype in one of Besnard's sleek, lifelike animals jaunting over a red, sunlit Moroccan hill.

He rode her at a good gallop through the Park until he came to Sixty-fifth Street, near the animal cages, and then suddenly a cry went up.

He saw men, women, and children running like savages, making the strangest and most hideous noises.

Turning, he saw not far distant from him and approaching with accelerating speed a firey-eyed lion that had broken loose from one of the cages.

The imperturbability that he always possessed did not forsake him, so he put spurs to the horse. This he thought his only hope, but the mare had already been terrified by the roars of the oncoming beast, and she ran wild.

Before him seemingly lay two paths to death, if he could not fight out some way of escape. The lion, approaching him from behind, would tear him into bits; the mare, if he could not drop from the saddle unhurt, with her mad, reckless running, would be very likely to throw him against a tree or stone and dash his brains out.

He quickly drew the reins to turn the mare behind a hedge, but by his sudden drawing of the reins he turned her into a park bench, which she had to jump. Her front feet went over like those of a trained fox-chasing animal, but the hind ones hung on the bench.

She went down, and Stanton Birch was thrown against a huge tree. The wild beast, alarmed, did not stop for the fallen prey, but kept on across to Eighth Avenue and through Sixty-fourth Street.

One of the park employees ran to the spot where the mare had gone down; there lay the

rider limp and unconscious, and the mare with a broken leg.

As the fallen man was lifted up, some one said, "My God! it's Mr. Stanton Birch." Every park employee knew him.

The man felt Stanton Birch's pulse. It moved faint and weak. "Send for an ambulance," he commanded; "he's still alive."

From his pocket he took a flask of whiskey,—one could not vouch for its quality,—and forced a little of it down Mr. Birch's throat to warm him until the ambulance should come.

In a few minutes the big red hospital wagon from Bellevue arrived and took him away.

In those exciting moments news of this accident had spread rapidly throughout the city; every paper in town had an extra. Publishers and newsboys are always glad when something happens to a personage.

Over the whole city one could hear their yells: "Extree! Extree! Stanton Boirch hoirt,"—"Extree! Extree! Stanton Boirch almost kilt by accident wid 'his hoss! Git 'em here; two cents a coppee."

As fast as the driver could he rushed the unconscious man to the hospital on Twenty-sixth Street.

An examination showed that the blow had produced a blood clot in the cerebrum.

Every noted brain specialist and surgeon was sent for at once. An immediate consultation was held; undelayed action was imperative.

Scientific surgery was then in its incipiency; even the most experienced surgeon would attempt so serious an operation with the gravest fear. It required the most masterful piece of trephining; one little mistake meant death, yet it was the only hope.

The operating table was put in order, and the unconscious man was placed upon it. His skull was opened, and the wielder of the sharp instruments moved them with skillful accuracy. Around him stood the other surgeons, with faces serious, —hopeful,—anxious.

Pretty young girls upon whom he might have cast a meaningless smile heard of the accident and hoped sincerely for his recovery. "Who knows?" they soliloquized. "I may yet win his heart."

The old darky head-waiter at the Albion Club ceased praying for the blessings of the Deity on himself and his family and now supplicated Him to restore to health "Missah Boirch, 'cause he sho is a good man." He knew that Mr. Birch's life meant fifteen or twenty dollars a week more to him. The directors of the charity institutions were in a quandary; whether they would rather have him die and thus take a chance on what he might will them or whether his yearly donations to them meant more was a problem that required close calculation; but they too concluded that it would be better to hope for his recovery than to assume an indifferent air. Whether he

died or not was immaterial to them so long as they were remembered.

"I believe the operation will be successful," remarked Dr. Post, the head surgeon, with confidence, when he had finished. The expression on all their faces became less tense, more hopeful, more confident. "Send for Miss Marston," the doctor continued.

"She's the pretty, black-haired nurse, is she?" asked Dr. Munn.

"Without an equal to my knowledge," answered Dr. Post, looking hopefully at the patient.

A young lady of twenty,—with widely set, tender, generous, expressive eyes,—entered. A sprightly little smile played around her lips.

"Miss Marston," began Dr. Post, "this is a very serious case and one that requires the utmost care; that's why I sent for you. . . . You are not to leave his bedside until orders come from me. I'll give you an attendant to wait on you. If you notice any change, if he seems to regain consciousness, notify one of the surgeons at once. You understand?"

"I think so, sir," she answered.

"Then I may trust you?"

"I'll do the best I can," she replied.

The doctors turned and left the room, and Miss Marston went about her work with more than her usual assiduity and earnestness.

For two days the patient lay in a state of coma. The doctors came frequently, always to hear the

same reply from the pretty nurse, "No change."

On the third morning Miss Marston, who was dozing,—she had slept only a few hours during the three days' confinement,—was awakened by a cry of "Jump, Dell! Jump, my girl!" Mr. Birch was regaining consciousness and was calling his mare to jump the park bench into which he had pulled her.

The nurse immediately sent for Dr. Post, who found the patient sitting up in bed, his eyes blazing with a wild expression.

"Did she get hurt?" he asked curtly.

"Did who get hurt?" returned Dr. Post, soothingly.

"My mare? Where am I, anyway?" he demanded.

"In Bellevue Hospital," was the reply.

"I want to go home; I want to go home," he said, determined to have his own way.

"You are not well enough yet." The doctor tried to convince him, but without effect.

"I want to go home, home," he kept repeating.

. . . . . .

"How do you feel this morning?" asked Miss Marston as she came into his room.

"Never hungrier in my life," he answered smilingly. "I should feel a thousand times better after some grapefruit, broiled chicken, and a pot of coffee."

"Fish is a better food for you," said the nurse.

A flood of sunbeams searched into every nook

and corner of the sumptuous room that overlooked Fifth Avenue and Central Park; and a flood of the sunshine of happy hearts made glad by the approach of Christmas,—the season when everyone,, everything, is glad,—crowded Stanton Birch's heart as he looked out and saw the peddlers with their holly, cedar, and mistletoe, as he heard the "ding-a-ling-a-ling" of the Salvation Army bell, the happy children asking one another, "What is Santa Claus going to bring you?" and all the other messengers announcing the joyous holiday.

Just why Miss Marston should have been more anxious about this patient than about any of the others that she had nursed she could not understand.

Fresh in her memory were many distorted faces and numbers of pain-racked bodies, some of which she had nursed back to health, and others that the unconquered Conqueror had taken for his own.

To all these she had been faithful, dutiful,—she had given to them every attention. In Stanton Birch's behalf she had given even more,—her prayers. She was certainly too sensible a girl to imagine herself in love. Still, the little fancy came and she beat it back with all her might, but each time it returned—reinforced.

"Oh, pshaw," she would say a thousand times a day, "I have no feeling for this man." "Why then," would come the inner response, "do you

drop every spoonful of his medicine with so much more care than you ever did for others? Why is the touch of your hand so much more gentle and soothing when rubbing his bruises? Why do you always end your prayers with 'And most of all, God, grant me my earnest supplication and restore Mr. Birch to health?'"

She turned to give him an "After-each-meal" dose from the bottle labeled "Shake well before using," and found his eyes fastened on her. For a moment she was confused, but she regained her composure almost instantly.

Before eating his breakfast Stanton Birch fed his eyes, his heart. His food for thought had been Miss Marston's mass of black hair of incomparable lustre under her stiff white circular cap; her kind, poetic eyes, deep set beneath heavy lashes; her youthful, girlish figure, every line, every curve of which was perfection.

"What young flower could have died prematurely and left its roseate tint upon her cheeks and its fragrance on her breath?" he thought as she was about to give him the spoon.

"Come on, my lady Æsculapius," he remarked, with a smile, as he took the medicine.

"Æsculapius had divine power," she retorted.

"So would you have, were this Mt. Olympus," he went on.

"But he could cure by mixing medicines," she added.

"Yours is a subtler and more advanced science of therapeutics," he continued.

She would not go on further. Instinctively she knew that he had watched all her little over-carefulnesses and had interpreted their meaning.

"Mr. Birch," she said, "I'm going to leave you."

Her words startled him; how had he offended her?

"Come, Miss Marston," he said, with a look of contriteness. "I've been brusque to you; you'll pardon my rudeness, won't you?"

"No, no; not that. No one could have been kinder to me; only I—" she stammered for a word.

"Salary then?" he broke in. "Well, name your price and I shall pay twice the sum demanded; only you must stay."

"Please, Mr. Birch, it isn't that." She began twitching her fingers. "You see you are quite on the road to recovery now, and I must go back to the hospital where others need me."

"But who told you I was well?" he protested. "I understood that you were to nurse me until I had fully recovered."

She did not answer; she could not. She felt the warm tears gathering in her eyes and she thought he saw them.

Nor did he press further. He felt strong emotions tugging at his heart, and he thought she read them through his eyes.

Stanton Birch had had everything he had wanted in life, and a great deal of it he had got by asking for it. Yet, here was this beautiful girl, lovely in every way, and his lips refused him that which his heart wished to speak. He was not afraid; he was ashamed. His covert manner in his lovemaking to her had been unworthy of the way in which gentlemen make queens of the women whom they love.

If he had dazzled her beautiful white neck with jewels, if he had brought her orchids and roses, if he had sent her bonbons, if he had taken her to operas and suppers, he would have felt differently about it, but not one thing had he done for her pleasure, there had been no lovemaking save the fervent glances and friendly words that had passed between them in his room.

But to let such an opportunity pass would have been madness. He knew that he loved her. Each day since he first saw her he had been telling himself so more and more positively. In her he recognized qualities that he had found wanting in the girls of his set; she was natural, she had a knowledge of the things in life that are worth while, and she had a willingness to learn what she did not know; added to this, nature had given her the crowning piece of all things that, according to a man's way of thinking, go to make a woman,—beauty.

He got up, resolute, and went over to the girl,

caught her in his arms, pressed her to him, and showered passionate kisses upon her lips.

"Zelda, you are not going to leave this house. You say I am well, but I am not. My heart is sick with love, and if you refuse my wish, it is sick with an ill that can never be cured until our souls meet in heaven. I knew from the moment I saw you that I loved you; I had never loved before, neither had you, but we each knew from the first that we loved each other. There's but one way for our happiness; will you choose it with me?"

The girl was frightened and she tried to wrench herself from him.

"Why do you say such things to me?" she demanded, still trying to free herself.

But his grip became firmer. "I say them because they are the things my heart wants to say and because they are the things your heart wants to hear. . . . You called me well; from the accident I may be, but do you suppose it was because of those badly put-up drugs that I was healed? No; I took them because they came from your sweet hands. The kind look in your eyes, the sweet words from your lips, the soothing touch from your hand,—they were restorative."

"But please, please, let me go, Mr. Birch," she begged. "You do not know my past. Between us stands birth, wealth, position, and I could never make you happy."

"If your past were as black as midnight," he said passionately, "your face would still have its heavenly light for me. Between us stands nothing but the unbreakable chain of love to which every human being must link himself if he would find happiness."

"Won't you release me, please?" she whispered. "I must go back."

She felt herself beginning to weaken. If he had taken his arms from her waist then, hers would have wandered up and clung to his neck. She felt his pulsating heart; she breathed his warm breath; was she conscious of what she was doing when she asked to be released?

"Why not stay in my country?" he went on jestingly.

"Where is your country?" Her words were scarcely audible.

"'Tis this old Fifth Avenue home, the walls of which are embellished with paintings and tapestries made by men when men had patience, genius; the floors of which are covered with bear skins from the frigid Arctic and tiger skins from torrid India,—skins that foolish adventurers have given their lives for. In the closets are the costliest porcelains and there are a few jewelry chests that contain many valuables. Over all this rules King Love. Let us be his never-sleeping, never-wearying bodyguards."

"How do you know I can stand the immigration test?" she asked, almost with a smile.

"I am the sole inspector and will pass you with honors, if you but enter my port."

"Do you think you'll always want me for an inhabitant?" she asked, troubled, uneasy.

"I swear to treasure you always as my most prized citizen; will you enter?"

She did not speak but stood on her toes and kissed his waiting lips.

. . . . . .

He rang for the butler to come for the breakfast tray.

"John," he said as the butler came in, "tell André to cook with more care." Then turning to Miss Marston he continued, "He's an old-time cook, but he makes far better bouillon and roasts than that Irish *chefess* you had at the hospital."

John took the tray and went out.

A few days afterward Stanton Birch and his nurse were married.

II

The years passed.

They were happy. And why not, when every gentle breeze that, bearing the winged messenger of love and striking the cords of their hearts, made the strings reverberate, lyre-like, with perfect harmony; when glittering-headed Gold had opened her vault and poured her treasure into their hands until they were running over, and when in themselves was that bigness of soul and soundness of mind that taught them the best use of their blessings?

Moreover, to crown their happiness the future of their twenty-two-year-old son blazed with brightness.

They held up to the world a mirror of wonderful transparency; and the world, smiling back at them, said: "I am not such a bad thing, after all, if only cynics, critics, and pessimists would boost sometimes rather than 'knock' always."

If on this mirror they saw a blur,—a hungering soul, a painful body, a diseased brain,—the philanthropic spirit within them said at once: "I am here, your ever ready and willing servant. Send me as a comforter to do the best I can for them."

Naturally, they were happy.

Their costly home stood on the top of one of the mountains in Clairmont, and its bronzed roof caught the sun's first rays as they awoke in the morning and the last danced on it as they retired at night.

Perhaps it was the deep reddish golden rays streaming over the tops of their house that gave Inness the inspiration for some of his masterly landscapes,—who knows?

A convention of representative Americans had recently met in a Southern city to discuss means by which the American people might be bettered, but one learned gentleman had digressed from the purpose of the meeting to hurl bitter philippics against a certain element of the nation. Nor would he take his seat, though the cries of "Sit down!" and "Shut up!" made his speech inaudible.

They were in the library, she sitting upright in an old-fashioned chair while he was half reclining in a Morris chair on the opposite side of the table.

The light from the bluish-green shade of the electric light struck the side of his face, accentuating the noble outlines of his intellectual temples. He had been reading an account of the above-named convention in the *Tell Tale,* which journal discussed American problems and conditions more liberally, with greater judgment, and with less injustice than any other American periodical, and to a man of his unbiased mind the bitter philippics

were naturally disgusting. He seemed annoyed.

"Oh botheration!"—this was his favorite and strongest expression—"why can't they let these people alone?" he said, with force and a frown. "Between them and us lie centuries of African wildness and two hundred and fifty years of American bondage!"

"The colored people, you mean?" she questioned.

"Yes," quickly. "I don't see why a people that have proved themselves thriving, earnest, and willing since we've freed them should not be allowed civil and human rights without always being attacked by fanatics."

"Remember the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' story, Stanton," she said, apparently unconcerned.

"My dear wife," he replied a little impatiently, beating the palm of his hand against the table, "be sensible; that's a perversion of ignorance that has caused the blood of a million souls. I tell you we are all the same in essence. Whether you believe that man was evolved from the plastic little Amoeba, whether you believe that life was hurled on earth by some flying meteorite from another world, or whether you wish to be old-fashioned and accept the Biblical explanation of things—"

"I accept the Biblical explanation."

"As you please," he went on; "but in any case the basis, the essence, the one little cell, that

makes one human being has the same fundamental parts that make another."

They were silent for a moment. She was more troubled than she seemed.

"But why not leave that problem to the South where there are more Negroes and where they are better understood?" she asked.

"Leave it to the South?" he demanded, turning himself around. "It's not a Negro problem, it is not a Southern problem, it is a human, live American problem. Should the settlement of the 'Immigration Question' be left to New York because most of the immigrants come to New York's harbor and because many of them settle in that city? No; just so, then, with these people."

"Are you sure, Stanton, that if you lived in a community where there was miscegenation you would not resent it?"

"I am sure I would always abide by the laws of nature, justice, and God; they are indestructible and irrefutable," he answered.

He turned to her for a reply, but it was not forthcoming. Then he resumed his reading, and she continued to turn over slowly and carefully the pages of the latest edition of May Manton's magazine, trying to select some patterns by which she would have the next dresses designed that she would give to the little children among whom she worked in Newton.

They did not hear Adrian enter as he was returning from a dinner that had been given to

him because he was to leave for Pemberton on the following day.

"Well, Bookworm," he addressed his father, "not gone to bed yet?"

"Hello, Ad," said the father.

"And you awake too, Mother?" He had gone around and now stood at the back of her chair framing her face in his hands.

"We waited for you because it was the eve of your departure," and the mother affectionately pressed his hand against her face. "You've come home early," she continued.

"Yes. Bob Norton was taking some friends to the station and I came up in his car."

"You've enjoyed yourself, I hope, Adrian?"

"Immensely; you know Eloise makes the most charming little hostess and Roy Houston was never more facetious than he was to-night. It was a whole round table of merriment and good cheer. Elsie Van Deman sang some of the arias from the latest French operas and Charlie gave by request a performance of the last creation of the Parisian tango."

Mrs. Birch was particularly delighted to hear about the Van Demans. Elsie had been one of her favorites and, though she had never breathed it to anyone, she had at one time fancied that she would like her as a daughter-in-law, but Charlie Van Deman had captivated Elsie. They had forsaken America immediately after their marriage for a European stay of five years and had just

the day before this dinner arrived in New York from Paris.

"How is Elsie?" Mrs. Birch asked eagerly.

"She has as much verve and beauty as ever," replied Adrian. "She said she'd be in to spend an afternoon with you to-morrow. She'll be awfully glad to see you, Mother."

"I shall be glad to see her, too, and Charlie and her little children. They must be beautiful,—perfect dears."

"Her little what, Mother?" asked Adrian.

"Her children."

"Why, do you suppose she'd be so old-fashioned as to have children?"

"Adrian, you shock me."

"I am sorry, Mother; but why?" he asked.

"Because Elsie is sensible."

"But her mind is not the mind of a woman that would stay at home and teach children their prayers, good manners, and culture. Her most serious thought is wondering whether she has more trumps than her opponent at bridge, or trying to unravel a mystery novel after she has read its first page. She would far rather wipe a tear from the eyes of a babe of one of her favorite servants than place a kiss on the lips of one of her own, because—being irresponsible, she wants no maternal anxiety or pain. She is a butterfly."

"You cannot be serious, my boy; you must be jesting."

"As you please, Mother; but you must admit that my jest has truth as its fundamental principle."

"Truth demands proof."

"This particular truth is easily demonstrated."

"But how; how?" she asked, with emphasis.

He took her finely-shaped little bejeweled hand in his. "Now, Mother," he began, "hold up your hand; count on your fingers every girl of our set that you remember who has married in the past five years, and see how many of them have progeny."

In her mind she saw beautiful girls to whom the best of the earth had been given at their nuptials,—mansions, tiaras, diamonds, millions, everything,—and on her fingers she enumerated sixteen to whom Hymen had come during the preceding five years.

"You've counted them?" asked Adrian.

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Sixteen."

"Now, how many have offspring, Mother?"

She tried to convince herself that the little foster daughter of Mrs. Conover and the little foster son of Mrs. Woody were their own, but each of these children was seven, and both Mrs. Conover and Mrs. Woody had been married only five years.

"How many children among them all?" he asked again.

"Six," answered the mother, thoughtfully, dispiritedly.

"A whirlwind repeopling of the earth," Adrian went on, a little joyful at his victory.

"But you are critical and unfair to them," protested Mrs. Birch.

"They are unfair to themselves," he replied.

Perhaps in the little skirmish Adrian had had the advantage. At least, he felt that his mother had been come upon unexpectedly, and his manner when he leaned over and placed a filial kiss upon her cheek revealed his penitence.

He had been narrow in judging so narrowly; if he had gone out and studied other classes of people as he had his own, would he not have found them different?

Perhaps; but usually a man's judgments do not go any further than his own experience takes him. His opinions are formed and his conclusions are reached while he is under the influence of the things he sees about him, of the things with which he is most often in contact.

Of course, at great intervals there appears a philosopher,—thank heaven,—a student of the world, a student whose mind goes far beyond that which immediately encircles him and such a student makes keen generalizations.

Stanton Birch, who had given little or no attention to what had been said by his wife and their son, now turned around, taking his glasses from

his eyes, and said, "You're leaving to-morrow, are you, Ad?"

"Yes, Father."

"What train?"

"Oh, early; but I shall motor down; am picking up some of the others in Newton. Do you want to take a spin to Pemberton with me, Father?"

"No, I thank you, Adrian; an appointment prevents."

"We shall miss you greatly," put in his mother.

"I shall be sorry to leave you, Mother."

The minute hand of the clock on the mantel was now moving toward midnight.

Adrian was the first to rise, and he slowly sauntered up-stairs to his room.

"I shall see you at breakfast," he called from the top of the stairs.

"Yes. Goodnight, Son," the parents replied together.

III

Adrian arose early the next morning, for more than one reason.

In driving his big gray racer the preceding afternoon at a gait that was certainly greater than that allowed by the Jersey speed laws he had met with an accident which retarded the speed of the car, and had greatly upset its smoothness of motion. Being an amateur mechanic, to tighten a bolt here and loosen one there had a fascination for him.

At six o'clock he had put on his oil-cloth suit, and, with a big Stillson wrench in hand, lay flat on his back under the car in his garage. Helping him was one of the gardeners, a sort of handy fellow with tools,—who had been out in the garden robbing the vines of the last of their tomatoes and lima beans.

After many drops of perspiration had rolled from his strong young forehead and not a few drops of the vicious, noxious machine oil had fallen into his mouth and eyes, Adrian crawled out from under the big machine, being satisfied with his work.

Breakfast was an hour earlier that morning than usual, and his father and his mother ate with him. Plainly they were sorry that Adrian was

going. He had gone three times before, but their reluctance this time seemed even greater than when he had gone down to become a "Freshie." He saw that they were depressed and he tried to dispel their gloom with jokes. And, had it not been that she expected the Van Demans that afternoon, Adrian's mother would have yielded to his persuasions to take the trip down with him.

As for the servants, who had nearly all been on the Birchs' pay-roll before he had come into the world, they were both glad and sorry,—sorry, because "young Mr. Birch was so gay," they always felt so "at home" with him, he always had a smile and a pleasant word for them all; and glad, because every time he left for college each of them got a crisp new ten-dollar bank-note from him.

His parents stood on the large veranda, and the host of servants, like a young troop of badly disciplined but ready soldiers, straggled over the velvety green lawn waving their handkerchiefs and hats, and calling "Good-bye" to him as he whisked the big car by them.

Mr. Birch and Mrs. Birch were glad to see that their son was so well liked and when they went into the house a look of gladness mingled with the tears that stood ready to drop from Mrs. Birch's eyes. They thought that with them all was peace, all was happiness.

But one can never foresee how long domestic

equanimity will last. Discords, upheavals, breaks, are always lurking about.

A lake under a warm sun appears a never-ending sheet of loveliness, serenity, placidness, but let one drop a pebble into it, even of the tiniest sort, and it becomes for a moment ugly, its face becomes full of frowns and wrinkles, it is agitated, and disturbed.

So in a home, if not one thing another happens to disturb tranquillity for a time. Suppose you had had a French *chef* who had been with you for more than twenty years; even though he had made your telephone bills ten dollars a month when it should have been only five, he would not be intolerable, for he would still see that your food was well cooked and on time. Suppose, then, he should fall passionately in love with Bridget McCoogan, *femme de chambre,* at the house nearest your own, and should threaten to leave you and marry his adorable Bridget. "She is so petite," suppose he would lovingly say, with his black upturned moustache, and with a shrug of the shoulders; when she was a good heavy-weight, one hundred and ninety-three in a bathing suit, measuring thirty-two inches around the waist. Or suppose he would say, "She has such beautiful blue eyes," when they were a cattish yellow, or, "She has such tiny little feet," when she had walked home from the car one night in a drizzling rain with a pair of sevens in her hand and her eyes

full of tears because her shoes had cramped her feet.

And suppose this valuable house-man, encouraged by his love, should some morning, when you needed him most, run off with his fiancée, leaving a note behind announcing in broken English that he had gone to get married, and did not know when he would come back. Naturally, your household would be upset for a while.

When Mrs. Birch returned from her morning ride she found her household in a very distracted condition.

Just what had happened she did not know, and, although the thought of what André had so often told them flashed across her mind, she dismissed it. She even allowed herself to think that his madness about Bridget was insincere, and that even if he were to marry her it would make no difference, for he would still remain with them.

"What's the matter?" she asked of Anne, one of the maids.

The maid did not reply, but picked up a silver tray on which was a letter addressed to "Monsieur and Madame Birch." She tore it open hastily.

"Anne," she breathed in a voice a little louder than a whisper, "I am so sorry."

She sank down into a chair in a sort of apathy. What she had not really feared had now become really fearful.

"He was such a good workman, wasn't he, Anne?" she went on.

"He was a brute," the maid burst out, taking up her white apron to hide her face and the tears that were coming. She could not stand the sweeping plaudits of her mistress when she herself had been disappointed. She had hoped that André would marry her, and his sudden elopement with that "Big Irish thing" had caused her no end of envy and hate. "Even though he don't love me," she would say. She had thought that his pleasantnesses to her meant something and that their years of association would eventuate in a union. "Why not?" They understood each other and could at least get along.

"Why, Anne," returned Mrs. Birch, "I'm surprised at your saying such a thing. I thought everybody was so fond of André." The maid did not respond immediately.

"Perhaps," continued Mrs. Birch, "that's the reason you abuse him—because you are fond of him. . . . Well, Anne, cheer up," patting the still sobbing girl on the shoulder, "you have a chance yet; thirty-two isn't so bad."

The maid understood that what Mrs. Birch had said was intended as a good-natured joke, rather than as a reminder that she was getting old.

Mrs. Birch went into the sunlit conservatory where the air was heavy with sweetness, and where flowers of various colors bloomed in riotous confusion. When she entered, Meg, a hand-

some red-beaked African Grey parrot flew toward her.

"Good morning," said the bird, in an unmusical contralto.

"Good morning," returned Mrs. Birch.

The little canaries began their song, too, and flitted from one to the other of the bars in their cages.

"Shut up, you cats!" screamed the infuriated Meg.

"Oh, Meg, Meg, girlie," said Mrs. Birch, "that's awfully unkind and impolite of you to talk like that."

The bird paid no attention to the reprimand. "I saw André run across the lawn this morning," it said.

"Yes, Meg, André is not going to be with us any more."

Mrs. Birch was watering the flowers.

"Why?" queried the bird.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you."

"Why?" again it asked.

"He's going to get married."

"Oh, he's crazy!" cried the bird.

The door-bell rang, and the maid announced Mrs. Van Deman. So overjoyed was Mrs. Birch that she rushed out and scarcely missed upsetting a beautiful, tender plant in a handsome Japanese pot that sat near the door, and the two women embraced and kissed each other lovingly.

It would have been extremely difficult for any-

one to tell which was the younger of the two women. Elsie was indeed a pretty girl, with a wealth of exquisite blonde hair, a lock of which always strayed loose and fell over her pretty forehead, keeping her finely shaped hand continually putting it back where it should be, while her pretty blue eyes had the tenderness of youth in them. But in Zelda Birch's face, though she was forty-two and Elsie only twenty-four, there was a youth that had been born to live always, a never-fading beauty.

"Why, Elsie," said Zelda, "you are as charming and lovely as when I held you in my arms as a child! What did you do, girl? Spend every moment of your absence in the youth-renewing, health-giving waters of Carlsbad and Wiesbaden?"

"It seems, Zelda, as if you'd found the spring of youth for which Ponce de Leon looked here in America. Age does but one thing for you,—it makes you more youthful and beautiful," she answered, a smile on her lips.

"And Charlie? What did you do with him? Why didn't you bring him with you?"

"He's playing off a match game of tennis with Artie Darnton that he promised to play five years ago,—before we went abroad. He said he'd join me here about 12:30."

"But, Elsie, my girl, what have you been doing? Where are——"

"I knew that was coming; I expected it to be

the first thing you'd ask me," interrupted Elsie, who had divined what was in Zelda's mind.

"Well, why?"

Elsie colored just a little. "I have not that in me."

"Haven't it in you?" Zelda said, with profound astonishment. "Be reasonable, girl. Why try to make yourself a new type of womanhood? I tell you that the intense desire to be a mother is as strong in every married woman to-day as it was in the woman who frantically cried to her husband, 'Give me children or I die.' Why should it not be in us? Do we not start every girl off in babyhood with that end in view? We give to every little girl a doll at Christmas; we like to see her hold it; we let her make its little clothes, tell it little stories, sing it little songs, rock it to sleep, prattle the little maternal things to it that she thinks it understands. We make every girl a mother before she knows she's a child."

"Then perhaps I was afraid," Elsie said.

"Of what?"

"Charlie."

"What do you mean, child? Doen't he love you?"

"Sincerely; but I don't think he loves me in that way."

"You little idiot! Don't you know that you are letting slip the *only* thing that makes a union happy?"

"One of the things that makes a union *bear-*

able, you mean, Zelda. You see, you don't make allowance for the difference in natures. Fortune favored you,—she gave you a husband who loved books, his home. Charlie loves merriment, play, and——"

"Oh bosh!" interrupted Zelda. "Every man naturally loves his own home. He can get as much exercise by playing with his own child upon his knee as he can by saying 'I'm going to take a walk for exercise,' and then goes instead to another house simply because it is kept in better order than the one that his own careless, uncheering wife keeps."

"But Charlie is so young and free, and I wouldn't want to keep him at home. I'm afraid he'd love children like most men love women,—they're mad about our smiles, but a tear, a frown, chases them away."

"Don't talk of the *dislikes* of the men," Zelda said a little impatiently. "Let the women find their *likes* and cater to them, and thus make them at once master and slave."

"There you are, Zelda,—as zealous and as serious as ever," said the younger woman.

"What about yourself?"

"Myself?" she answered, with a little care-free smile. "I am still a shining bubble floating on life's tide, tending nowhere, purposeless, free, laughing, hoping only that it may ever buoy me up and that I may never run into any gurgling

whirlpool to swallow me up. You know, Zelda, I think that my kind of people are put into the world as a reminder and a stimulus to your kind of people to keep them from forgetting that there is something in the world for them to do."

"What makes you have such a fancy about yourself?"

"It isn't fancy; my every act makes my shortcomings more clear and real."

A moment of silence passed between them,—a silence that was broken by the entrance of their husbands.

"Look! See whom I picked up on the courts this morning, Zelda," said Mr. Birch.

"Oh, Charlie, I'm so glad to see you, my boy," was Zelda's greeting, and Charlie warmly pressed her hand.

"How do you do, Father Birch?" said Elsie,—this was what she had always called Mr. Birch. "How splendidly you look," she continued, "and as handsome as ever. Why tell people you're fifty-six when your looks tell them that you are only forty?"

"The same little flattering girl," said Mr. Birch, "trying to make me believe what isn't true."

"'Tis true," she protested.

"My teeth, my dear, are beginning to wear, and a surer proof there never was than that to tell one that he's getting old."

"How was the match, Charlie?" asked Zelda.

"Fine; I won as easily as a big boy thrashing his little brother."

"Honest?" she asked.

"As I ever was," he answered.

"You were not always honest with me."

"Then, accuser, recall to me my robbery."

"'Twas a very serious one,—and one that hurt."

"I am so sorry."

"Are you sure you can exonerate yourself?"

"I shall do my best."

"At what price?"

"That of my honor and my life, if need be."

"Oh, Charlie; I'm not tired of you yet," said Elsie jestingly.

"But, dearie, my honesty has been assailed," he returned.

"Well," said Zelda, "after all, the joke is on me."

"What's the joke?" he asked.

"You robbed me of Elsie."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know that I had always planned to have Elsie for my daughter-in-law."

They all laughed.

"And to think," said Stanton, "that Zelda was going to give me another child without even letting me know of it."

"But I'm satisfied with the steal," said Zelda. "And now we'll have some luncheon."

IV

"I have engaged a new *chef*," said Stanton one morning after breakfast about three weeks after André's departure. He had just returned from a western trip, having been to Texas to look over his cattle ranch and to Montana to arrange to sell some of the stock that he owned in the copper mines.

On his way home he had stopped in Buffalo to see an old clubmate, Billy Dodd, who was just about to go on a yachting trip on the Mediterranean and down the Nile. With him, of course, were going many of his servants, but his *chef* refused to take the journey. Therefore Stanton engaged the man and took him home with him.

"I am so glad, Stanton," said Zelda. "Things have been in a miserably bad condition. Will he suit us, do you think?"

"Billy says that he can't be beaten, Zelda; suppose you show him what to do."

Then, with his golf bag, he rode over to the Balastol club to put in a morning at the sport that was now rapidly coming to an end because of the cold weather.

Zelda stood for a moment in the embrasure

of a bay window in the morning room watching the leaves that were being blown from the trees and formed into little whirls by the wind. The strength of the breeze through the half-opened window made diminutive hills and valleys in her dress.

She pressed the tapering manicured forefinger of her right hand against her lower lip while the other hand pulled nervously at a little grey button on her waist.

She was mentally greatly depressed; in her heart there was a heaviness that was uncommon to her. Her trepidation, so far as she could see, was without meaning, yet, for that very reason, she was all the more disturbed.

"Why?" she asked herself. "Why this fear?"

Perhaps fate, fortune, or chance sometimes tells us of the approaching shoals, windstorms, and icebergs while we are wandering on life's ocean, and we human ships do not more often escape these dangers because we are so utterly heedless of their benevolent admonitions.

"Pshaw; nothing can disturb my happiness," she persuaded herself.

She never had but one thought that worried her, and while it was, and had been for twenty-five years, a daily visitor, she believed that it was now merely a habit, and she even ventured to say to herself with confidence that the possibility of such a thought's becoming a reality was impossible.

Yes, fate does sometimes warn us of dangers, but, soulless thing! she is too jealous of her own power to let us into her mysteries, thereby revealing to us the means of escape; she likes at times to make high-salaried actors of us all, a tragedian with his stirring bursts of emotion and pathos, a comedian with his lightness and humor, while she,—the audience,—weeps, laughs, or derides, according to the way our performances impress her.

Zelda dismissed her forebodings, and went to the kitchen to tell the new man what his duties would be.

But as she went her heart became heavier and heavier.

When she entered the kitchen the man stood with his back to her, with one hand on the valve of the boiler that was roaring thunderously. So deafening was the noise that Leon, the cook, did not even hear her entrance.

"Good morning!" she said to the new man.

The *chef* heard her and seemed a little startled, but he quickly regained his composure and turned, hat in hand, to respond not only politely, but with a courtly bow. Zelda had an uncomfortable feeling that she had seen the man somewhere before.

Why she colored she perhaps never knew, and she would have stoutly denied ever having done so had she later been told of it, yet she was certainly conscious of the hot blood as it rushed to her face.

Why should she be excited? Because she had always the constant fear of meeting *one man.* In this man, though, there could be no danger. She was the employer, he the employed.

She eyed him from head to foot. He was dressed in immaculate white, and his clothes fit him faultlessly.

Had he had on a cap with a green crescent-shaped brim, golden cords around the band, and a few silvery stars sprinkled at intervals, one might have said that he was the millionaire owner of a yacht instead of Stanton Birch's *chef.*

"You're the new *chef?"* Zelda asked.

"Yes," was his somewhat laconic but polite response.

"We expect you to do all the ordering and to arrange our menus. Breakfast is at 8:30,—this is the one meal that Mr. Birch always wants on time,—luncheon at one, and dinner at 6:30."

Spot, her fox terrier, had been jumping upon her, pawing, and barking for recognition ever since she had come into the kitchen.

"The dog is very fond of you, Mrs. Birch."

"He is of every one; he makes friends quickly, if one does not look suspicious."

"Yes, he and I are good friends already. Come on, Spot," he coaxingly called, patting his hand on his knee.

Mrs. Birch glanced up sideways from bending to arrange the pink bow in Spot's collar, and she started to speak, but instantly the thought that was

uppermost in her mind ran away from her. She stood in utter bewilderment for a second, and her only escape was, "Oh, I shall speak of that later; remember, luncheon at one."

She rushed from the room, and when she reached the dining-room she reeled and would have fallen, but a chair saved her. One glance at that man had been enough to send her into a world of distraction.

Before her rose images that had for twenty-five years been napping or dissembling sleep in her breast, ready to spring up fully awake at any time,—images of fear, disgrace, exposure, death.

If she had been in a room where there were thousands of people and had not seen this man, she would have been conscious of his proximity to her! she would have felt him; his cold, cynical, searching eyes would have sought her out.

Each day of her life she had hoped, prayed, against this moment, yet this terrible thing had come to her,—this terrible thing from which there was no escape.

"Oh, God!" she sobbed, hysterically, "have I merited this in your sight?"

Dismay and tribulation had almost overwhelmed her, but fortune had been moved enough by her sorrows to keep away all the servants who might have come that way during her moments of indescribable grief.

After all, she might be mistaken. This might not be the man that she feared. There was a re-

semblance between this man and the one she had known in her girlhood, but his manner had been straightforward, not suggestive of any former acquaintance.

Yet she was not happy. Over her hung a cloud of the blackest sort,—menacing, threatening, destructive. If she had not seen this man before, she had certainly met one exactly like him. She was tormented by that haunting, ghost-like memory that she could not shake off.

Alexander, the world's conquering conqueror, never enjoyed a sweeter moment of revenge and satisfaction than did this Leon. A truer "master of all I survey" never lived. The hour for which he had longed had come, as he always believed it would.

"I shall make myself the greatest man in all the world," was the determination with which he had started life. "I must prove worthy of Zelda, and if I fail!—Oh, I shan't fail!"

For this woman he had made and unmade himself. With her, God only knows to what peaks of glory he might have reached; without her, grief, despondency, had seized him, and last and worst of all, he had started in search of a goal where were to be found relief of mind, repose of body, but the road to it had been clouded with opiates, on fire with rum and other indescribable forms of dissipation.

If, however, he could have found her in his travels, all would have been happiness. Would

she follow him ? Certainly,—did he not know the strength and the weakness of every thread that sewed up her past? Dare she rebel against his faintest wish? If she should be so firm as to deny him anything, he would have revenge, no matter what the cost.

She was to have a committee of ladies meet her at her house the next afternoon to discuss plans for the betterment of working-girls, and she decided to tell Leon to have some bouillon and sandwiches for them.

She opened her mouth to say something, but the utterance was never heard.

He seized her in his arms, encircling her waist, and rained hot, impetuous kisses on her face.

"Zelda! Zelda! Zelda!" he burst out, with theatrical passion. "My idol, my love! This is the most blissful moment of my life. My famished heart, sickened by the want of love, had almost given up its search for you, but on and on and on I coaxed it, feeding it with the unsustaining food of hope,—hope, hope,—telling it that some day it would be fed to satisfaction, and now that moment, that heavenly moment, has come."

"Are you——" She got no further, her whole frame became limp, almost lifeless in his arms. For the moment she was too horror-stricken to resist him.

"Yes, I am," he broke in hotly, removing the disguising moustache and rolling up his coat sleeve to show her a mark that he knew she would recog-

nize. "Zelda, my dearest, I knew that I would find you. I knew that all the years of my heart's yearning would not be fruitless."

"What do you propose to do—with me?" she questioned in a tone of one almost dead.

"To take you with me," he said passionately, firmly, holding her hand while she tried to wrench it from him, "to live every moment of my life in your presence, worshiping you, adoring you, loving you, my own, forever."

"But I am married," she begged.

"What does that matter to me?" he retorted hotly. "Did David give up Bethsheba because she was the wife of Uriah, or did the wonderfully beautiful Paris give up the still more beautiful Helen because Hymen had united her and Menelaus!"

"You say you love me."

"As God loved the youthful earth when he repeopled it."

"Then won't you for your love's sake give me up?"

"Bah!" he scowled wrathfully, "talk sensibly! My kind of love is not the liberal, self-denying kind; it's the sort that seizes, robs, pillages, wants the whole, everything, for itself. There have been heroes in war, heroes in religion, but the world has never known a hero in love. Men who win trophies of women never sacrifice themselves that others may enjoy their prized booty. They want them forever,—to feed their aged eyes on when

they're old; to quicken the retarding beat of their hearts when they are declining. The man that gave up the woman he loved of his own volition never lived, and never will live. Such men are but the phantastic figures created by the brains of novelists after a night of revelry or when their minds are saturated with dream-bringing dope."

"But Leon, Leon! be merciful," she begged. "Can't you see what this would mean to me; think, think! Oh, please try to forget. Don't tell, Leon; don't tell," she pleaded frantically. "Don't you see my dishonor, disgrace, shame; the happiness of my whole life, my hopes, the things I had set my heart on,—all would be shattered in one instant. Forget, Leon, forget. Don't, don't ask it." She sank to the floor in a heap, too distressed to say more.

"Dishonor,—shame? Your happiness fled?" he reiterated scornfully, a frown on his domineering brow, his eyes again aglow with a look of revenge. "For what do you think I've allowed my soul to burn as if on the fiery brands of hell turned over by the piercing tridents of the devilish imps; for what do you think I've fought battles, won conquests, lost all the sweetness of life, to become this morbid, wretched, dissipated vagabond that I now am, if it was not in the hope that some day I might find you, have you for my wife, have you always,—an atonement for my wrongs, a compensation for my sufferings? Come! I leave here in three days; you shall go with me."

"Listen, please, listen." She struggled to her knees, her whole frame shaking. "Leon, if you but spare me, I will give you anything you wish,— I will build you country homes, city homes, yachts, give you every comfort, every luxury in life shall be yours, only you must, must spare me. Money I——"

"Ha! Ha!" he broke in with a mocking laugh. "You bewitching little feminine Mephistophiles! You would have me sell my heart, my very soul, to you. No, no, I won't do it, not even to such an adorable little angel as you are. Money! Money!" he went on contemptuously. "What shall I do with it? All desire to live decently except with you have gone from me now. You propose to pay me a salary; I do not want it. Food free, sleep free; and Mr. Birch's clothes would fit me perfectly, if I wanted them. He doesn't mind, you know, he's so rich, has so many wouldn't miss them, would he?" Then he continued in a haughty, triumphant manner, "Moreover, I——"

His keen ear heard the muffled tread of Mr. Birch coming toward the kitchen over the soft rug in the hall. In fact, he had been listening all the while.

He quickly picked Mrs. Birch up and set her in a chair near the door. Then he snatched a carving-knife, cut his finger so as to get a good flow of blood, and was at the sink running cold water on it when Stanton entered.

"Good morning, Leon," he said. Then he turned and saw his wife on the chair.

Excited, he exclaimed: "Goodness, Zelda! what is the matter? Speak! dearest, speak!"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Birch," said the *chef*, with a courtesy, "the sight of the blood from my hand caused her to faint; I carelessly hacked one of them nearly off and she saw it. She will recover in a moment."

Stanton was bathing her head with the water that had been brought and he had ordered a maid to bring some whiskey in a hurry.

She soon revived, and as she opened her eyes slowly she saw her husband standing over her.

"It is you, is it, Stanton?"

"Yes, darling." His strong arms lifted her to his breast. "I am so sorry. Come; lie down awhile."

"I fainted at the sight of the blood," she said as she sat up on the couch, her back leaning on her husband's arm. She was not as truthful as she should have been, for she had never seen the blood. But in her semi-conscious condition she had heard Leon speak of it.

"Yes," her husband answered, consolingly, his soft hand still rubbing her forehead. "The blood shook you all up; shall I send for a doctor?"

"Oh, no, Stanton!" she protested. "I shall be all right in a moment, I'm sure."

"Won't you let me call in the doctor?" he again said, appealingly.

"Certainly not; I'm perfectly myself again; to show you that I'm not the least nervous I'm going to play you something on the piano."

At the piano one would have thought her some Russian virtuoso about to give her farewell concert as her little fingers ran over the keys.

"Won't you sing something, Stanton?" she asked after she had played one of Chadwick's brisk allegrettos. Adorable Chadwick! How splendid he is at times, but even in his gayest, brightest moments he cannot help being sad. For every laugh in him there seems to follow a tear.

"Yes; what shall it be? 'That Mysterious Rag' or 'Everybody's Doin' It' first?" he asked jestingly.

Zelda had heard these songs from the lips of the little urchins in the tenderloin district where she had the "Home" in Newton.

"What do I know about such songs?" she asked.

"As much as I do, my dear lady," he replied, apologetically. "I heard your own maid singing them."

He went to the cabinet and taking therefrom a sheet of music that Adrian had bought,—a love song in one of the season's popular operettas, which he had heard somewhere along Broadway, —placed it before her.

"Are you ready?" she asked.

He had not noticed her disquietude, and he began to sing:

"You know I love the light that shines
From distant worlds above,
The birds that sing in joyful spring
Are also mine to love.
The flowers that bloom, whose sweet perfume
Makes fragrant all the air,
All this is but a shadow of
The love to you I bear.

Chorus

"My love, my life, my all in all,
Thou art my soul's guiding star,
My greatest gladness, my hope in sadness,
Thou lead'st me when near or far;
Bid what thou wilt, I'll gladly do.
What care I what befall?
To show how great is my love for you,
Thou art my love, my life, my all in all.

"If death should take you from this earth
To go to worlds unknown,
Why should I live? My life I'd give
In search till you I'd found.
And when we met we'd ne'er forget
That no more should we part.
My love is like a love divine
For you, my dearest heart."

"Wonderful, Stanton; I declare I should far rather hear you sing that than to sit at the Metropolitan under the voice of some heralded baritone from across the water. You are just splendid."

Spot had come in and jumped up on the divan, and was now rapidly beating his stubby tail upon the top of it, which was his way of showing his appreciation, and Meg, the parrot, shrieked from the conservatory: "Keep it up, Pop. Bravo! Bravo!"

At luncheon she appeared radiant, adorable. They had never seemed happier together.

In the kitchen Leon was boiling with anger, jealousy, revenge. His blood did not run but it leaped in his veins. Here was this man singing love songs to the only woman he had ever loved, —wished to love,—cared to love.

A quarter of a century before he had held her in his arms as Stanton now did, and had been made happy by the promises she had made to love him always. Now she was the wife of another, and he,—a knave, a menial, a servant in her house.

God! to what desperation the thought of such a thing drove him. Then he calmed himself.

She must be his or be wrecked by him. If he had passed these last twenty-five years in search of her and had at last found her, certainly he could endure anything a few days more in order to get her for his own.

"You go to the 'Home' this afternoon, do you not?" Stanton asked when they had finished luncheon.

"Yes; and you?" she replied and asked as she dipped her fingers into the little silver finger-bowl.

"A society of young men have asked me to speak to them soon, so I shall probably pass the afternoon in the library preparing something to say. . . . You have done wonderful work at the home, Zelda."

"I could have done nothing without your help."

"You are wrong. I'm not responsible for your success. I am proud of you."

"Well, Stanton, we're both trying to live so that others too may live. . . . Now, good-bye; I must hurry." She kissed him on his cheek and left him at the table to finish his cigar.

Perhaps there never was a worse district in all the world than the tenth ward in Newton was ten years before Zelda first went into it to begin her work. Long-silenced Babylon with its innumerable houri, Rome with her wicked Nero, even Sodom and Gomorrah could not have been worse.

Zelda's first night down there had almost cost her her life. She had advertised for days that missionaries would speak on a certain night at a certain time on a certain corner. But those people didn't want to be good, they wanted no reforms, so they prepared to make trouble.

When she got up to speak pale-faced, black-eyed women threw pails of beer and dirty water all around her; drunken sots uttered the vilest profanities in her hearing; little ragged, dirty urchins marched around her beating tin cans, blowing horns, dancing, and yelling to drown her speech; lascivious youths hurled putty, stones, and broom handles at her lights, and, having broken them, left her in total darkness. But she did not swerve; and when they saw her persistence a gang of cuthroats rushed upon her to bear her off and take such of her clothes and jewels as were salable.

But the leader of the gang prevented any harm from being done to her. When they had taken

her into a dark cellar, in which there had never been a ray of light since the builder put the ceiling over the room, he questioned her, and seeing her unbending determination he said to her:

"Well, youse kin come as offen as youse likes; see? But what youse says won't do God,—whoever he is,—nor nobody else no good; see? Dese kiddies don't mind if youse buys dem a pair of shoes once in a while and the rummies and touts and cadets will stand for a cup of coffee or a drink from you now and den, and we'll all be glad to git in a T'anksgivin' and Christmas dinner outer you; see? But dey won't pay any mind to what you say. Anyway, youse come whenever youse likes; see? And I'll break any damn guy's neck what tries to put one over on you; see? 'Cause youse is a game gal, and I likes a gal what ain't scared of de rummies; see? So now youse kin go. Let her out, boys!"

And they all snatched off their hats and eyed her as if she had been some white-winged goddess from another land when she passed them. But to assure her of the truth of his promise the leader went with her to the boundary line of the district wherein he was king, but he dared not go farther, for there were innumerable rewards for his head, if caught, but he knew that he was safe so long as he was in his own precincts.

But in his prophesies he had erred. In ten years Zelda,—by her charity to the little children, her benevolence to the youths, and her kindness

to the grown people,—had changed this dirty, confused, chaotic, wicked district into a clean, orderly, decent one. She was called "The Lady of God" with the greatest respect by the men and the "Lady Bountiful" by the children.

Skinny Hagan, Nigger Jones, Izzy Greenbaum, Dutch Smultz, Woop, Damfino, all called off their corner crap games, pitching two-bit notes, dealing three-card monte, and as soon as they saw her automobile approaching they all stood, hat in hand, and bowed courteously as she passed; and they did not dare to resume their gambling until she was well out of sight. And the wife of the "Scotch Fitzmaurice," one of the liquor dealers in the ward, had now become the greatest temperance lecturer in the city. In Mrs. Birch's missionary "Home" were the children of poor and unfortunate Americans, Italians, Jews, Germans, Negroes, Irish,—and they all regarded one another as human and humane, which was due to the work that she had done among them.

In going from the Assembly room that afternoon Mrs. Birch passed out into a long, well-lighted, well-ventilated corridor, then through a pair of opaque glass doors that stood at the head of the dark stairs that descended to the basement. Between the top step, as one ascended from the basement, and these glass doors, which made indistinct anyone behind them, was a space about four feet square. Mrs. Birch had pushed the

door open and had gone two or three steps when a voice said, "You are in a hurry."

Startled, she turned and looked quickly around. There stood Leon to her left behind the door, his cold, dissipated eyes fastened upon her and his ever-moving smile on his lips.

"You here?" she asked, alarmed.

"My dear," he answered, "I love to see those pretty little lips at work; they are indeed the most beautiful piece of human machinery God ever fashioned, but why waste that fragrant breath of yours on unnecessary questions? Certainly you would not ask if the stars were in the heavens, if you looked up and saw them. Do you not see me here before your lovely eyes?"

"What do you wish now?" she asked bluntly.

She had never taken her hand off the door, and it still stood half open.

"You are cold to me," was his response, in a pleading tone. "Why not close the door that we might be alone?"

"I do not care to be alone with you."

"Heavens be merciful!" He threw up his palms like a worshiper. "To think that my most adorable lady would deny me my fondest wish when we have been so long apart!"

"How did you know I was here?"

"To what end will the world come?" he said mockingly, his feelings being piqued at her query. "Do you not yet know that my love for you tells me everything; that between you and me there is a

telepathy,—a wish on your part that I should always be near you? Come, kiss me; let us be ourselves again. We did not finish our happy reunion this morning before Mr. Birch broke in on us."

She had had time to compose herself, and she now closed the door noiselessly. She also told herself that some tact must be used, that to repulse him would be a mistake, believing that he would stop at nothing, if she was not pleasant to him.

"We shall probably be here for some time; shall I tell your chauffeur not to wait?"

"No! I shall go in a moment."

"And with whose permission; did I say so?"

"No; but you're a gentleman and would not forcibly detain me."

"My gracious!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "Your clever words have awakened my pride, have knocked at the door of the manhood in me that has had a Rip Van Winkle sleep. In truth, if all the world had called me a gentleman, I should have called them liars, you excepted, but you would make me believe that I am almost genteel again. What a wonderful influence your nearness to me has over me for good. I believe before we've been two weeks together you will have me like the sacred old patriarch, ready to mount into my chariot and ascend heavenward on the first strong breeze."

He slowly stepped toward her, but she repulsed him and shrank back into the corner.

"Please, Leon," she pleaded; "do you intend always to shadow my life as you have done since you came; must I be always fearful, always expecting the worst, with never a moment's peace?"

"Certainly not," he returned boastfully. "I shall make you happy."

"But, Leon," she begged, "do you not see that if ever in my life I have done any wrong to anyone I am trying to atone for it,—with my whole soul I am trying to be charitable, benevo——"

"Charity! Benevolence! Philanthropy!" he said superciliously. "Oh hypocritical humanity! What gorgeous and dazzling cloaks thou purchaseth to hide thine own real nakedness, thy sin and falsehood; 'tis all a sham, a put-on. A friend dies, a devastating disease comes, a war is declared, and ignorant, foolish souls then give 'to the poor,' to charity, that some ever protecting mist may obscure them from the calamity. God, like self-sacrifice, is hidden in a cloud of superstition that makes a fool buy a knave a pair of shoes that the 'Murrain may pass over me.' They give to the poor and lend to the Lord in the hope that he will protect them. . . . Charity! Love of good! I tell you no one does anything without the hope of a recompense; it's all an exchange,—a loan, with a big interest attached; the lender always issues a statement for his pay. Jacob,—seeing all the wonders of heaven, its streets of blinding brilliancy, the angels ascending and descending,—never would have gone his

journey to the sons of Haran to meet his beloved Rachel had his covenant with God been less than his Master's promising to furnish him with gold, food, and raiment. I tell you they give no more sincerely than did the rich young lord whom Jesus told, 'Sell all thou hast and follow me.' The woman who throws her babe in the whirling Ganges has a far purer motive than have you philanthropists."

He paused a moment, then he continued, sneering: "But I won't be hard on you, my love, although I know your imperviousness to blandishments. You'll accept my profound congratulations for your matchless work here; will you tell me how you did it? You were always so good, such a genius. Did you, when you first started, turn water into wine to frighten them, to gain their confidence; and do you send out every day a boy to purchase five loaves and three fishes to be changed by your magic into enough to feed a large crowd and then have twelve baskets left over?"

He stopped for a second. "But, come," he resumed, "you shall be ready in three days, won't you, dearest?"

Her feeling was one of anger rather than of fear, yet she realized her danger. She silently prayed for some intervention, and her prayers were answered. The heavy tread of the night watchman was heard coming down the hall.

Leon seized her and tried to force her into

a closet, but she broke loose and declared she would scream for help.

"Give me fifty dollars, then,—quickly. I want to treat the rummies."

She quickly drew the note from her gold bag and handed it to him.

Then she turned hurriedly as he hid himself in the closet and walked out into the hall, meeting the watchman.

"Good evening, Horace."

He noticed her curtness, and was surprised at her unusual manner.

V

Pemberton had won. The newspapers had large headlines, reading "PEMBERTON WINS." For a long time it had been the other way, but to-day the Pemberton half-back had got loose at a critical moment and run down the field for a touchdown,—shaking off tacklers as he ran.

Never before had there been such rejoicing, such weeping. That day on Pemberton's campus thousands of dollars had exchanged hands.

Splenetics and rheumatics threw away their crutches; superannuated men, whom time had robbed of their voices, made their presence felt by ringing cow-bells. Powers in finance, lawyers, doctors, ministers, congressmen, senators, governors, and even an aspirant for the American Presidency,—all graduates of historic Pemberton,—had returned to see this great game.

The romping, energy-creating, soul-stirring zig-zag snake-dance had lost none of its fascination, and up and down Waldron Field undergrads, recent "grads," and alumni danced this unique dance until they were almost without strength. The songs of "Old Glory" and "85" thrilled as they had never before done; the customary bonfire

was received gladly as is a new born child by its expectant parents.

A hot-headed, patriotic "grad" now paid a dollar for a lemon and blue pennant that might on the morrow be bought for a dime. Souvenir postcard dealers were glad, for to them it meant extra money; post office clerks swore vociferously, for to them it meant extra work.

In the cities, from the theatre stages, the score flashed "Pemberton 6—Hall 0." Around the bulletin boards in front of the newspaper buildings so thickly had humanity collected that to pass was impossible. Thousands of café suppers were won and lost; hundreds of Pemberton students sat in the boxes at the Winter Garden and watched Gaby Delys in her rhythmic glides, and after the performance they proposed marriage to her, which under any other circumstances they would never have done.

The crowds departed, but ecstatic enthusiasm was not to lapse into quietude in Pemberton for many days after this historic happening.

And who had been the hero of this victory? Adrian,—"Ad,"—"Addie." It was his last year, and his brilliant performance placed him among the "Pemberton Immortals." At his asking that night, the world would have been given to him, had it been in the power of the students and graduates to give.

This tall, muscular, well-developed boy of twenty-two, with an abundance of dark brown hair

growing full on a slightly receding forehead, had been immediately after the game seized by a contingent of the student body who styled themselves "Worshipers of Dionysus and Sons of Epicurus," to be taken by them to New York in order that they might show him what real life was along Broadway,—in the cafés, cabarets, and what-nots.

They took him on their shoulders to his room, and made him promise that he would pass a night with them in New York during the Christmas holidays.

So greatly did he wish to be alone that he was still debating whether or not he would attend the "Senior Prom." But there was no rest for him in his room. After the departure of the "Worshipers of Dionysus and Sons of Epicurus," whose motto was "Everything goes with us," another fraternity,—perhaps of a somewhat more respectable type,—came calling at his door: "Adrian! Adrian!" They knew he was in his room, but when he refused to answer, a skeleton key was brought out, and they unlocked the door. Then they pounced in on him, dragged him from between his sheets, and, becoming self-appointed valets, soon had him in his dress suit and pumps, ready to attend the annual "Prom" in the spacious Gymnasium.

Perhaps there is no place in elegant, luxurious, ostentatious America where so much of its crême de la crême at one time gathers as at a Hall-Pem-

berton football game and the "Prom" which follows on that night.

Newport, Narragansett, Bar Harbor, the Berkshires, Atlantic City,—no one of these can gather together all the élite in summer, for they vie with one another, as do Palm Beach, Nassau, California, and the West Indies in the winter, but on the day of this game nothing like it happens in the world.

Mothers do all they can to adorn their daughters for this occasion, and they pay unbelievable sums to have their pictures put in the popular dailies; an emaciated divorcée, whose name is better known in Reno than elsewhere, fancies that among these inexperienced youths she may find her second husband; an old maid tries to make "Pinaud's" costly cosmetics take away the parentheses around her lips, darkens the few red brows that are left, imports a gown from Worth, and places her poor deluded brain under a wig by Hepner, hoping that she may "come back" to something that she never was; in marked contrast are the sweet, lovely, unsophisticated girls, whose naiveté and youthful innocence make them too good to be associated with some of the wild students with whom chance might thrown them at this "Prom."

Here never sleeping Cupid sports; here he breaks and makes hearts; here he wins stakes that startle even himself; he plays a thousand games, but in every one he is master, holding every trump in every deck, nor does he resort to sleight of

hand but steals their hearts right before their eyes.

A senior wrangler avoids a pretty heiress, a devout Y. M. C. A. member falls into the net stretched by a wily little widow; two "pals" dissolve an almost sublime friendship because some blushing beauty may have danced with one more than with the other; promises are made, oaths are taken only to be broken.

What! Man of the world! Do you permit your lovely daughter to go into a gathering like this? Can you not see the evil that is in this crowd of hot-headed, undisciplined boys? Do not take such chances.

You see them all together. You think that they will all be great successes in the years to come. How silly of you! Do you not know that some of them will fall, that some of them will be a disgrace to themselves and to their Alma Mater?

You sit in your box and watch your daughter as she trips over the floor,—she smiles, she laughs, —she is happy. To whom is she talking? Pardon me for telling you. Save her while it is yet time. Look how she smiles into that fellow's face. They call him a "good fellow"; everyone does. Bah! there is no good in him; he is called good because circumstances have always favored him. He is handsome and clever. Granted; but look, do you not see his sinister expression? See how he smiles his peculiar smile as the dainty girl looks up at him. Run! run! little Innocence!

You're a new kind of flower, and he,—he is dangerous.

They say he is a South American and—rich. What a lie! But he is not to blame for that. The mystery with which he has always surrounded himself has caused others to originate that story, and romance is close kin to mystery. He, in truth, was born not ten miles from where he now stands; and rich? Oh, no! Listen; I'll tell you a secret: Observe his broad shoulders, his great strength, his virility. Well; there are three very rich women of middle age who admire that young man. One is across the hall now watching the little girl. Her face is hot; she is furious because he is talking to this pretty débutante, but she cannot create a scene. When she sees him alone she will cry and say, "You don't care for me any more." But he will lie to her and say that he does,—he has no heart,—and they will make up again. The other two women are at home. Oh! run from him, little Innocence.

In the summer time he makes many trips across the ocean beating the "sharps" at their own games.

Have you really fallen in love with him? If so, one is sorry,—that is, if one knows you both. When he goes abroad this summer he will not return. Can you forget him as easily as he can you? Perhaps.

Who is the stunning woman in the crimson gown? Red; red is always a danger signal. What a shame that that inexperienced youth of eighteen

should become a victim to her wiles. What a fool you are, boy! That woman had broken many hearts before you had yet learned how Caesar built his bridge. She tells you pretty things and sets your head in a whirl. She told other men the same things when you were in your swaddling-clothes. Can you not see Becky Sharp in her eyes and Irina on her lips? She has no feelings. She has broken every toy with which she ever played. But one forgets that you do not know women yet; you were brought up in Sunday School on Bible stories. Gracious! Did not Esther and Delilah teach you anything? They were both wreckers of men. You rave about the color of that woman's cheeks and the lustre of her hair. Why don't you look at her closely? She pinches her face to bring the blood every time you turn your head, and her hair! A Fifth Avenue coiffure specialist finished that wig for her only yesterday. What! she told you she was only twenty-four and you believed her! How can women say such things? She is thirty-six years old. Where are your eyes?

What wretchedness and what happiness are mingled in such a gathering!

Some of these young men will be great; some of them are as pure as untainted snow and as sincere as truth itself. Some of them will see in the faces of their sweethearts everything that makes life worth while.

What is that tune they are playing? "The Blue

Danube," and without knowing it they all thank Herr Strauss for gladdening so many hearts.

Then "Home, Sweet Home" will follow and "Good night,"—"Good night,"—"Good night."

VI

"Believe me," drawled Roland Bullock about six o'clock the Sunday evening after the game as he burst into Adrian's room, "she is some girl."

Adrian, who was entertaining himself with one of O. Henry's latest productions, was half reclining in an easy chair, with a silk pillow at his back and his legs stretched out obliquely, resting his feet on a hassock. He neither took his eyes from the book nor replied to the intruder.

A crowd had just returned from the station, having gone there to say good-bye to their sweethearts of a day's acquaintance,—or of a year's devotion. And of course the parting had cast a gloom over the university. The past twenty-four hours had brought to some of them pleasures that they would never know again.

They sauntered back from the station lauding, adoring, worshipping some recently-met girl, and speaking disrespectfully of some others; but Bullock, who wished to play a game of solitaire with his thoughts, had jogged on ahead to be alone in order to think only of one girl,—to be by himself with the memory of the most beautiful, the sweetest, the pleasantest girl in the world,—a memory from which he wished never to part.

Bullock sat down for a moment, but rose shortly thereafter and began pacing nervously up and down the floor, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets and with a step heavy like that of a German soldier on march. Thrice he looked at Addie, who had not yet spoken and whose silence irritated him, and at length, unable to keep quiet any longer, he burst out: "For heaven's sakes, old top; can't you say anything solacing to a fellow whose heart went away with that girl?"

"Pardon me, Roland," said Adrian. "I did not mean to ignore you, old chap; certainly, I'll comfort you. Either go after that heart and bring it back or batter down the door of the Science Building and get a cat's heart; they dissected some there Friday."

"Cut out the nonsense, please; I don't want to laugh."

"I beg of you then, Roland, not to flood me with tears. O. Henry has just awakened lightness of heart in me, and I am not willing to throw it into a gurgling pool of tears, especially when they come from a man."

"You're impossible, Adrian. Go back to your reading."

"You won't hold me responsible for your feelings, will you?"

"No; only I thought——"

The door opened and in came the rest of the boys that had returned from the station. Bullock had never stopped trudging the floor, and one of

the newcomers, noting his nervousness, said facetiously: "Well, Roland, your actions are perfectly justifiable. I guess we'll all be somnambulists for the night."

"You know one thing," said one of them, as they sat down around the room, pulling up their trousers, pushing back their hats, rolling and lighting their Pall Malls, Egyptian Dainties, or Bull Durhams.

"Yes, and only one thing," put in a second; "and that is that Miss Croydon is the prettiest girl I ever saw."

"Some pippin; yes," chirped a third.

Then Zack Tamer spoke,—Zack, the former Bowery bartender, who was indebted for his education to "Shark" Wilkins, who was known as the "slickest guy on the Bowery" and whose attention had been drawn to Zack's pellucid mind on a summer's day when that youth had mixed for him a rickey with a California orange instead of a lime. For Zack's vocabulary neither the East Side classics of that masterful writer of underworld life, "Chuck Connors," nor the faultlessly compiled Encyclopedia Britannica would be responsible, for some of his words had their antepenult in Arabic, penult in Hebrew, and the last syllable might be either Icelandic or an expressive motion of the hand to bring out its meaning. Yet he affected an air of refinement,—his hair was pompadoured, he was dressed in a black-and-white pin-striped suit, with a fraternity medal sus-

pended from a gold watch-chain that stretched from one to the other of his upper vest pockets, and at one end of the chain was an Ingersoll watch. But he had never altogether lost the Bowery coarseness of either his manner or his speech.

"I tell you, fellers," broke in Zack, "she's got any filly that has ever run on these fast Pemberton tracks beat a thousand ways. She could give 'em all a half mile handicap in a mile race and leave 'em at the last quarter."

"I protest against your speaking of such an adorable girl as a filly," shouted Anton Scutter.

"Remember, gentlemen," returned Zack, "that my language was only figurative."

"Then make it more sublime," retorted Scutter.

"And you know, fellows, she's heiress to a million, too," put in Bob Atkinson.

"Thou Hunter of Fortune!" jeered Zack. "Already in your brain little devils of sloth are conspiring to do the first piece of work of their existence. They are intent upon winning this girl for you, believing that if they could get her, they would retire to their downy laissez faire couches to rest forever in beatific tranquillity."

"You don't suppose I'd want to marry a pauperized dairy-maid, do you? My father quits me cold as soon as he buys my railroad ticket home in June."

"Certainly," said Bullock; "love in a cottage is the only kind; what would life be without its struggles, sufferings, disappointments?"

"You are absurd," said Atkinson. "Poverty and love do not go together. Do you suppose Xantippe would have been a quarrelsome, ill-tempered, hen-pecking wife and Socrates a patient, good-humored, hen-pecked husband if old Soc. had been a prosperous Athenian merchant instead of a lean, hungry, ill-fed philosopher, lecturer on morals, and ethicist?"

"Bravo! Bully for you, Bob!" shouted Zack. "I thought that you'd lost all of ancients that you ever knew and was sure that you knew no more of Socrates' *affaires du coeur* than I do of practical church government. But I was mistaken."

"As far as I can see, fellows, we might dispense with circumlocution and come back to the real subject," said Adrian.

"Ha! Ha!" they all laughed. "Then you are interested just a little, are you?"

"Only to the extent of hearing your wonderfully beautiful eulogies about the young lady. Beside her Venus must have looked like a stone woman, if one may judge from your expressions concerning her beauty."

"But we had consigned you to the class of misogynists, had believed you as unimpressionable where girls are concerned as is adamant beaten upon by a baby with its toy hammer," said Zack.

"Say, what's this?" asked Atkinson, motioning his head at Adrian. "Will he be the mad lover who'll wildly rush forth in pursuit of a resisting maiden?"

"What! she resist Adrian, you say? She'd give every penny she owns this very second for a smile from him," put in Scutter.

"And where did you get so much inside dope?" asked Zack, with a distinctly Bowery pronunciation.

"She told a lady friend of mine as much," replied Scutter. "All girls have chums you know, even when they are in love."

"Um,—philosopher," sneered Atkinson.

"But I thought I'm not shaped for sportive tricks, not made to court an amorous looking-glass," sighed Tom Blackwell, a long, thin, gawky Westerner, as he picked up a hand-mirror from the dresser and looked at his almost inhuman face, with its prolonged chin that began behind a pair of large ears and ended on his chest. Between his eyes and his upper lip there were as many reddish brown freckles as his father owned dollars in the Western railroads.

His frank confession and his lack of sensitiveness because of his homeliness brought forth a roar of laughter.

"The bard was inexpressibly generous to you, Tom, for having written those lines," put in Atkinson. "They fit you, every word of them, even to the letter."

"Well, I'd like to have your chances, Adrian," said Blackwell.

"Why my chances? I am not at all sure of them. Remember the fool that rushed where the

angel feared to tread?" replied Adrian, in an admonitory manner.

"Taking them all in all," put in Ted Matthews, "the girls were beautiful last night, don't you all think so?"

"Yes; but so shallow and untrained," objected Mart Downing.

Blackwell, who was a champion of woman's rights, said, "Let them sit beside us in our classroom for a few years, give them an equal chance in all our activities, then come to a 'Prom' fifty years hence, and you'll meet with another type."

"Sorry, Blackwell," began Mart, nonchalantly, "I cannot call you an innovator,—Mill said that half a century ago."

"Yes; and Havelock Ellis would say the same to-day," said a voice from the corner.

"And pray let Frau Olive Schreiner complete that trio," chimed Scutter.

"Shut up; how do you know she's German?" snapped Matthews.

"Say what you wish about women," broke in Zack, "they have gone beyond their capabilities now and are retrograding. The Greeks had the right dope when they kept them making biscuits in the kitchen."

"Cynic," snarled Blackwell.

"I should like some recognition from Miss Croydon," said Atkinson.

"In that you are not alone," agreed the others.

The bell for the vesper services in one of the

city churches pealed forth, and silence for a moment filled the room.

"Dr. Carey speaks on 'Phillips Brooks' to-night, fellows," said Addie slowly, "and I think I shall go to hear him."

They separated; some went to hear the lecture, some went to their rooms, and others thought that midnight might as well find them in town as in the "dorms."

VII

Dear Adrian: Because of the wonderful part you played in the football game Saturday, you no doubt have received a thousand congratulatory letters and telegrams, most of which speedily found their way to your waste-basket unread. But I beseech you to treat this letter more kindly.

You are very likely going to call me a bold adventuress! What matters that to me? I have enclosed my sensibilities in walls of adamant, so that I may not be hurt by anything that you may say to me.

No doubt the centuries that your ancestors believed that this is a "man's world" still have their influence upon you. But the eyes of wisdom of your father Adam, and of my mother Eve, were at one and the same time opened; together they ate the wonderful fruit that the beguiling serpent had led my mother Eve to steal, but your father Adam took none of the blame; he relegated her to domesticism, put on her the "must nots," and claimed everything for himself. My pleading for suffrage is neither bellicose nor passionate; at least, I shall never smash windows. I admire femininity, but may not the antelope once in a century leap upon the lion unawares, gore him to his heart-strings, and get away unscathed?

May not I—although of a gentler sex, you say—be daring enough to advance a little to you without your thinking ill of me?

Yes; your game was wonderful, but in it all I could see nothing but you, *you*. In our dance, in our brief conversation, it was all the great soul of Adrian, not the outward Adrian at all, that I was conscious of.

I am forward, familiar, unconventional. Yes; yes. I know; yet I am not apologetic. How much too long people have already allowed the shadowy, filmy barrier of convention to stand between them and their own good!

The congenial souls of the earth yearn to understand, to know, to love one another better. Then, let us learn to know each other; let us lay to the ground the conventional walls

that lie between us, walls built of the rock of mistaken modesty.

I have said some things I wished to say, but not all.

Let me know what you think of me!

Remember, I'm the antelope and you the lion.

Yours,

WANDA CROYDON.

Adrian found the letter awaiting him on his return from class-room one morning. He hastily replied:

DEAR MISS CROYDON: Your congratulations are highly appreciated. But you hint at sentiment.

I am a prosaic creature, not the sort of person you would care for.

To be your friend I should count a very great privilege; but love—why, it is not in me.

Sincerely yours,

ADRIAN BIRCH.

She wrote back:

DEAR ADRIAN: I did not mean to hint at, I did not mean to suggest, sentiment. What I want you to understand is that you have awakened in me what no one else in all the world could have done.

No; until I saw you I never wanted a lover; not even in thought, but now I have one, and it is you. Adrian dear, you have been reading your Plato with your eyes, not with your brain. Does Plato's theory, after all these centuries, still have followers? I was sure—poor ignorant little I—that men had buried it face downward and written upon its tomb this epitaph: "Gone forever." Certainly he could never have intended it to be interpreted as it has been interpreted.

You propose a friendship between two persons of opposite sex? Preposterous Adrian! It can no more be than a fair-haired boy can kiss his elbow and straightway be transformed into a beautiful blonde girl—you remember that nursery story?

And even if we would have it so, how could it be, Adrian? God did not start us off that way. The emotion that he

planted in the first two people was later to be the awakening of love between the opposite sexes, an emotion stronger than any friendship can ever be and the only kind that can exist between a man and a woman.

Look into your soul, Adrian, and confess to me that I am right.

WANDA.

When Adrian dropped the reply to her first letter in the letter-box he resolved to drop from his mind the memory of her, but her second letter shocked him, greatly disturbed his thoughts.

She was skeptical regarding his knowledge of Plato, she had made a weak attempt to interpret Biblical love, and, most appalling of all, she supposed him interested in her.

Beneath the violet of her dark eyes was entombed a soul not of the pureness that he had supposed, but steeped in vulgarity. The words from her pretty lips were children of a brain that was carnal, sensual.

She was a shatterer of conventions, a wrecker of a decorum that was a thousand years old; she had a religious face, a devilish heart,—she was a truthful dissembler, a perfidious angel.

In her was not one jot of the modesty that he had believed hers. She was even unworthy of the feminine fineness of her handwriting. Her girlish talks and actions were for the "Prom," and that being over, she now revealed her real self. He was angered because he had allowed himself to think so well of her.

But wait, Adrian. You misjudge her. You

are ignorant,—bound by conventions. When one reveals his real self to you, you do not like it. You prefer shams.

If you had written first to Wanda and told her that from the milky way you would pluck enough stars to make a string of pearls to adorn her lovely neck; if she had set aflame in your heart an imperishable love and you had told her so, would you have been forward, bold?

Young man, lover of the old, despiser of the new, you pretend that you like sincerity; but you do not. You want delusion, counterfeit, humbug; you have always wanted it; you would not know the truth if you could. You cry for that which you do not understand and what you understand you do not want. You want dissimulation, prevarication; you like the mysterious, the shadowy; gilded things attract you.

Lamb chops eaten from a plain platter would not taste as well nor send as much good nutritious red blood coursing through your veins as would chops eaten from a silver platter, garnished with lettuce, tomatoes, and parsley.

Nobody likes to be told the truth. A poor man soon leaves the church where he is told that he desecrates the Sabbath when he goes to Sunday morning baseball. The rich clubman will not permit his minister to tell him that he breaks the Sabbath when he passes the Holy Day in playing tennis, golf, poker, and pinochle. Even though these men know that such admonitions are good

for their souls, they will not listen to them. They want to be lied to, they do not want to know their real selves. For them to look into their own souls is scarcely bearable, but the cold, critical, scrutinizing insight of another person is something that they cannot stand. And so they make masks of their faces, and tell lie after lie in order to conceal their poor, pitiful, real selves.

Wanda knew that she had been moved. Her thoughts of Adrian gave her happiness,—a happiness that she had never known before; in her breast swelled up emotions that to her were new, yet as old as the sun itself; warm, yet as pleasant as a gentle breeze after a shower; turbulent, yet as calm as a lake at dawn; fearful, yet confident with overwhelming assurance.

As plainly and as truly as she could she had tried to tell Adrian how she felt, believing that he would understand; but her letter had met with disfavor, had been ignored,—was repulsive.

Yet, when he thought the best of her, his very soul shamed him for having allowed his thoughts to be steered by the aged, half-blind pilot of convention into the foaming channels of what it seems "Ought to be" because it seems "Always to have been."

Was not this girl to him the loveliest of all that is lovely, the most beautiful of all that is beautiful, the most womanly of all that is womanly in woman?

VIII

Zelda rode home greatly perturbed. After a strenuous day she was completely fatigued, body and mind.

Leon's persistent insistence that she go away with him was like biting, stinging acid poured on her wounded heart.

Judged by the standard of human goodness, Zelda was a good woman. She tried, in the midst of her trouble, to look optimistically upon life; she tried to believe that adversities and disappointments are but temporary evils sent to develop one's character.

She wanted to run the race set before her, to endure to the end, to travel the narrow path, to get up when she stumbled,—she wanted to keep the faith.

Centuries ago some philosopher said that nothing was unchanging, at rest. The earth, the seas, the trees, life,—everything,—is in incessant motion. Each life changes, and the mind, the beliefs, the thoughts that make it up, change with it.

If some person in whom we had unbounded confidence should commit an act that would shake that confidence, we would lose it with regret, ad-

mitting that "To err is human." But if we were to tell an ascetic that our faith in Christianity was wavering, to him it would be a shock almost unbearable; yet sometimes it seems in the midst of tribulations that one's faith must waver, must sicken almost unto death. Everything changes; but the difference between faith in God and faith in humanity is that, though faith in God may at times seem to be breathing its last, the Healer of Healers gives new breath, new inspiration, and our faith revives.

The thoughts of the past combined with the forebodings of the future sickened Zelda. She questioned the justice of a Supreme Being, the rewards of a life of usefulness. Was there any difference between the fruit of an evil tree and that of a good tree? If one did not taste the fruit, each looked equally pleasing. Could she be mistaking appearance for realities? Had her life been a failure?

She thought of the following story that she had recently read:

A careless sower aimlessly scatters grains of corn upon uncultivated soil. He goes off and leaves them to care for themselves. "Let nature take care of them," he argues. "Why should she not; they are her children?" The seeds are hearty and try to live, and Nature, looking compassionately on them, gives them rebirth, sprouts them, nurtures them; they spring up, grow, ma-

ture, and yield ears, the grains of which are large, regular, full, and juicy. He invites his neighbor to come over to see him reap, to see him pull the ears from their stalks. His neighbor is a judge of produce. "Wonderful!" ejaculates the neighbor when the husk is torn away revealing grains full-sized, beautiful in whiteness. "I should win a prize, if I could farm like you," he continues sincerely, after his host has told him what results he had received from so little care.

Another sower plants corn in fertile soil. When weeds would choke the shoots he chops down the intended murderers. When it does not rain he turns cooling water on them to cool their little parching tongues; they grow, they mature, the stalks are thin but strong and sinewy, their tassels meekly bending a little.

The two sowers live on adjacent lots, and their harvests are ready at the same time for reaping. He too invites the neighbor to see his pulling.

With assurance, he pulls back the husk; the neighbor sees a small grain, regular, full, but not with the bursting fulness of the corn of the careless sower. The grains are yellow, not white, but he again exclaims, "Wonderful!" His exclamation now, however, is not sincere, and he feels ashamed of his hypocrisy.

Would the observer passing by the show window ever know that one ear of the corn exhibited there had been given more attention than the other?

The neighbor, to test the worth of each, took them home, and prepared them for eating, seasoning them to please his palate.

"Small, insignificant things should be out of the way first," soliloquized he, so into the small ear he stuck his teeth. It had all the freshness and sweetness of youth. Ravenously he ate it, at each bite wishing that by some magical power the emptied space on the ear might again be straightway filled, that he might feast forever, it was so good.

Then he took the large ear grown in stony ground; from all sides he admired it and praised its producer. At last he bit into it,—'twas like biting into chaff. It was tasteless, tough, almost bitter. It was fit only for swine and goats, not even a chicken would thrive on it, while a lord would willingly have paid a good price for the other.

"Then," he said to himself, "I have been fooled! I have taken the shadow for the substance; I have trusted deceptive, treacherous vision; I have taken appearances for realities."

Then, are both sowers deserving of equal praise? Isn't it the well-directed, useful life that's worth while? Both ears of corn had been Nature's children; yes, but one was her child with Chance as one of its progenitors, while the other was her child, too, but it was also the child of Reason. One was a child uncared for, unaided; the other had been protected, nourished, and

Nature, striving always to perfect everything she produces, had coöperated with Reason in its nurture.

Zelda looked out through the windows of the automobile.

The grass was dead, the shrubs lifeless. At a distance she could see a tree, naked, stripped of its foliage.

On one of its branches there still clung a leaf, which was being blown hither and thither by the wind. Beneath this branch she could see a blue-headed woodpecker thrusting its bill into the tree's body as if moved by a machine. But among all this wintry death Zelda could see some life, the round, strong evergreens,—firs and cedars.

The wind swept over the mountain at a merciless, terrific gait into the face of her driver. Above her head, when she looked heavenward in the November sky, clouds were collecting and disintegrating. A storm seemed imminent, the sky was black, not a star in sight yet; this threatening heaven fascinated Zelda.

Presently she caught sight of a star that shone but dimly. And just as she saw it the envious, jealous clouds must have seen it, too, for the clouds rushed to it and so obscured it that it faded into nothingness; but still she watched.

Suddenly the moving clouds came together and formed a cross as perfect as the one on which

the Saviour gave his precious life, an atonement for the world's sin.

From the point of intersection of this cross shone the once bedimmed star, now with unbelievable brilliancy. It seemed to light up heaven and earth; it seemed to Zelda a covenant, a light from God's own hand, a light similar to that which emanated from the dying Jesus' head.

So, she thought, is every life,—a star life. At twilight it is born bright, then the night clouds come and hide it, but at dawn it shines brilliantly, because it is stronger, steadier, after the night's darkness.

Leon's threats were clouds, nights, come to darken her path, to make her lose her way. From these thoughts she was aroused when the chauffeur stopped the car and opened the door.

At dinner Stanton said but very little to her, and for this she was truly glad. His natural reserve and his unobservant manner when he was engrossed in thought were to her a great boon at this time, for it relieved her from answering the questions that he certainly would have asked her concerning her disturbed look,—a look that she had tried to conceal. She had passed an extra quarter of an hour before her dresser trying to cover up the dark lines,—children from the wombs of worry and anxiety and fear,—under her eyes, and she had rested, hoping to bring some color into her sallow cheeks.

The whole afternoon her husband had been in

the library studying the systems of taxation, preparing for the speech that he was to make that night.

"Our present system is wrong," he thought. "The man of moderate means who improves his property, beautifies his home, surrounds himself with good pure air in an elevated location, should not bear the greater part of the taxes. A gross injustice is committed. . . . The burden-bearers should be the rich real estate owners and dealers. They push their tenants into low, marshy places, —birth-places of malaria and typhoid,—into houses with leaking roofs, paneless windows, water-covered cellars where tuberculosis is king. In these squalid rooms idiots are born, weaklings, anarchists, evil-minded creatures, without moral codes, away from Christian and uplifting environment. These hot-beds of disease endanger the health and peace of the community; for them the State must have sanitariums for tubercular patients, madhouses, schools for the weak-minded, homes for weaklings. Why not make the very wealthy improve their property, thereby increasing the chances of life for the rich, as well as the poor, by providing better, healthier surroundings?"

Zelda, as she was to be alone that evening, would have time to compose herself, to rest her jaded mind.

"But," thought she, as she kissed Stanton goodbye, "suppose Leon should be here?" at which

fearful thought rapid waves of heat followed by still faster waves of cold ran through her body. Her spine felt as if it had been taken from between two cakes of ice. Her knees shook like a wind-blown leaf.

She made one step, but her feet did not seem inclined to move. Grasping the big brass knob of the door, she steadied herself against it, and suddenly, — happy thought, — she remembered that Leon, too, had gone out for the night.

Out into the night's blackness she stood gazing, —seeing nothing,—thinking, thinking, thinking.

In her warm bed-room laden with the odor of fresh cut flowers she prayed. The deep crimson light cast its bedimmed reflection over the ornamented walls, over the embroidered curtains and woven rugs. She was surrounded by all the luxury, the taste, the voluptuousness of the sensuous Orient.

In her kneeling posture her gown of silk, which clung to her, revealed every line of her perfect form,—her curving shoulders, the almost masculinely strong muscles of her back, her small waist, her slightly curving hips from which she tapered down to her little feet, which, heels upward in juliettes of baby blue tint, stuck out from beneath her gown. In her ivory white arms folded before her she buried her face.

The crimson light, throwing itself upon the two big, black plaits of silken hair that hung over her

shoulders, gave the effect of a sinking, blood-eyed sun pouring its last rays upon the wings of a crow.

Upon this bowed-down suppliant Leon gazed!

He could hear her beseeching God's mercy for the world's redemption, asking Him to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, warm the chilled. He heard her resigning herself solely to Him, imploring Him to make her more compassionate, less selfish, and, last of all, he heard her say in tones of pleading humility, "Oh, Lord, show Leon thy goodness, greatness, thy mercy and love." Down beside her he started to throw himself and penitently exclaim: "Yes, Lord, I am Thine. Show me Thy ways, Thy goodness, Thy mercy, and I will follow."

But straightway some imp within him said: "Thou fool! thou prayest to the wind and it bloweth harder in thy face, to the sun and it burneth deeper into thy skin, the waters and they engulf thee in more rapidly gurgling pools. What have His goodness, His mercy, His love, done for thee? When thou stoodest on the apex of the mountain of success He swept it from under thy feet; when thou wert sober He made thee a drunkard, a vagabond; when in love He stole thy loved one from thee. Now, fool, revenge thyself with all the mad mercilessness of an avenger."

Zelda arose. Like bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked Aurora issuing from her nightly prison, she seemed undaunted yet shy, austere yet gentle, commanding yet forgiving, human yet angelic.

As she turned back the covering to get into the bed she felt herself within the grasp of two flabby arms. Sidewise Leon had seized her and was raining hot kisses on her cheeks, neck, arms, forehead. He rendered her speechless. The fright made the blood rush to her face, the vein in her round neck showing itself above her nightdress stood out.

She was almost senseless and he began drawing her close to him so that they felt the beat of each other's heart. His breath blew into her face.

Before she could regain her strength he began in a drunken manner: "Zelda, I tell you, you are my breath, my blood, my heart, my life. Without you I can no more live than can a striving weed in a mountain glen where it never catches one ray of the warming sun. I wither, I suffer in the desire to preserve my own existence, I die in the struggle.

"No, no! Zelda, do not reproach me; hate me. I know I am a dissipated vagabond; do not think that I am ignorant of the fact. My brain, though diseased, is a reflecting glass revealing to me my whole sordid, mean, debased, drunken, licentious soul. But, God! Zelda, can't a fellow have a chance?

"In the noxious, filthy, pestilential marshes of Brazil grows a flower of the rarest sort. Perhaps men would never think of going to this pestiferous, insalubrious bog to get it, were it not for its purity, its sweetness, its beauty. But over

the bad soil that gives it birth it throws out its sweet odor, it stands up majestically commanding all who go near: 'Behold! I am a thing of wondrous beauty living in the swamps because they are kind to me, and I will grow nowhere else. Forget my muddy, unclean mother and the great struggle you have had in reaching me, for I am worth it all.'

"So, then, let your lily-pure self be a rare flower, a prize worth a struggle, growing nowhere else but out of my black, muddy, grimy life, but diffusing your sweetness throughout the world.

"I was not always a marsh; life for me too once held joys sublime, enchanting, like those they tell us are to be found in heaven. Then you were my all. I wanted you until I thought Zelda, thought and thought Zelda, until I lived Zelda and nothing else.

"When I had made fortunes; when men feared me and respected my brain; when I was honored; when fathers pointed me out to their sons and said, 'There's a great young man'; when reporters sought me like hungry pups following a bone that I might say one word for them to print; when I was a *success,*—then somebody told them that I was a——"

"Good God! Don't say it!" shrieked Zelda frantically; but he went on:

"That I could have stood; the world was large, and I knew it. I knew that I knew more of the paths that lead to success than do most men, and

I could go somewhere else, change my name, if need be.

"I say I could have stood that stigma, could have found myself again, but God! your God! Zelda, when they told me you were five years married, that you had a son and he did not bear my name, the world ended for me!

"What had been paradise was now poisoned by the venomous serpent, the floods came and wiped away all life, men's tongues confused me, their voices irritated me, the earth rushed back into the void whence it came, and God withdrew himself from it.

"All that had been sweet now became bitter, happiness became wretchedness, from being healthy-minded I became morbid. Then I thought that perhaps your husband might die, that I might come again into your heart.

"I always saw your eyes gleaming like the light that shines in heaven above, making bright the way to each traveler. With all the fervor of our childhood I still adored you, worshiped you, as when you dominated me, as when as children we slept in each other's arms, as when we declared our love for each other in old Mark's rat-infested garret. Say that you love me, Zelda."

Sobbing deeply and too weak to make an attempt to release herself from his grip, she said almost inaudibly, "I can't."

"Can't?" he retorted angrily, "You *did*."

"In childhood I thought I did."

"Thought you did in childhood? Then why not now?"

"Forgive me, Leon; I was ignorant, a child, I did not know. I knew nothing, you knew nothing, except childish love. We did not know each other. But now it is different. Do you suppose I could love you now?"

"Oh, rot!" answered Leon, irritated by her refusal. "You dissimulator! You didn't know? Why, it is the first lesson a woman learns,—to wring a man's heart, to steal his soul, to make his life miserable. Her bewitching smiles, the love-light in her eyes, the allurement of her voice,—these she is born with or soon learns as she looks with vanity into a looking-glass. I want you and I am going to have you, no matter what it costs."

She had now regained herself and her well preserved strength stood her in good stead, for she wrenched herself free, and threw him back against the wall with a crash, so that he tilted the dresser as he stumbled.

"There!" she said. "You're a coward."

"You are mistaken," he replied. "Love is a warrior; he fights to win."

"If Mr. Birch should catch you here, he'd kill you."

"If the loneliness of a pining heart, or the joy it gets from having found the one for whom it longs, does not kill neither can the fire of lead nor the ice of steel."

Anne, the maid, stood in the door and looked

at them, amazed. She had heard him declare his love to her, had seen him kiss her, had seen her in his arms, had seen her crash him against the wall, and now she stood, white as a statue, speechless, wondering what it could all mean.

If Zelda had known that she had been seen, she would not have lived another minute. The thought of having been seen by one servant while another made passionate love to her would have caused her to die by her own hands.

"You're going away with me," said Leon, coming upon her again, but carefully, for he was a coward. He was conscious that he was no match for her, knowing that his persistent indulgence had robbed him of his strength; but he had a weapon to use upon her that was far more powerful than force,—his knowledge of her past life, his knowledge of what she was.

"I'm not going to spoil the years I've spent in making my life happy by letting you with your threats come between me and my husband," she said, feeling confidence in herself.

"You won't," he sneered; "then I'll spoil them for you. What will they say when I tell them you've lain in my arms all night; that you promised to marry me; that you solicited my presence in your room when your husband was away."

"Stop! Stop!! Liar, hypocrite. Those are all lies and men will not believe them," cried Zelda, almost crazed.

"I know they're lies," went on Leon, "but men

love to believe lies about women. What will they say, I ask, when I tell them that I sent you checks while you were in school, that my picture was in your locket that you kept until the day your child was born, your husband not knowing it; what will they say when I tell them that you are a——"

"Have mercy, Leon!" she begged.

"Then promise you'll go with me."

"I can't."

"Promise!"

Still stoutly she answered, "I can't."

"Do you want the world to know——" A slam of the front door was heard. "He's coming; promise!"

"I'll meet you," she whispered and fell senseless on the bed, while he glided out of the door.

IX

Zelda arose after a sleepless night. All night long she had lain awake waiting for day, and it seemed to her that ages had passed before the dawn came. She had managed,—how she did not know,—to gain sufficient strength to get herself properly into bed before Stanton came into the room. They were old-fashioned in this respect, —they shared the same room,—and few words passed between them while Stanton was preparing for bed.

During the night she had been careful not to awaken Stanton, who was a very light sleeper, for she felt that had he awakened and questioned her, she would have broken down and told all her troubles.

When she arose her face was anemic, her eyes were old with worry, myriads of years had passed over her.

She had promised, under compulsion, to meet Leon,—for what? To have him slip the noose around her neck?

No; she would meet him. He was mad. Her husband, kind Stanton, would protect her, would defy anybody to say aught against her; but could

she ask him for protection against a secret such as hers?

In a murky room on the fourth floor back of one of the old-fashioned houses on the lower east-side, near the haunts in which the "Monk Eastmans" and other east-side "gangsters" had hidden after they had played a disastrous game, Zelda found herself. The place had had no proper ventilation for generations, but now the swift morning wind rushed through the broken panes and apertures where the mortar between the bricks had crumbled away. In fact, not even her heavy furs afforded sufficient warmth to Zelda, and the rusty oil stove that Leon lighted gave out but little heat.

On the walls hung carelessly a few disgusting pictures, and tacked up here and there were cards on which base-ball players and prize-fighters figured,—donations from the cigarette factories that send out these specimens of art into the world through Piedmonts, Trophies, Fatimas. Then there were favorite race horses, matinée idols of the "Star and Garter" shows, and two or three kodak pictures of the "Annual Saloonmen's Outing."

The floor was carpetless, and a step in this hollow room sounded as strange as the breath of a ghost in a graveyard at midnight. Over toward one corner was an old dark-colored washstand that had no spread on it except a covering of gray

dust about half an inch thick, and on it was a dilapidated wash bowl and pitcher.

The musty appearance of the place had disgusted and sickened Zelda.

"Listen," said she as she sat down in one of the two chairs at a square, uncovered table in the center of the room, the chair screeching as she sat down, "this is the last time I shall ever follow you because of your threats."

Leon,—who had either not heard her, so busy was he with fixing the stove, or if he had, paid no attention to her,—observed blandly: "This shall be made a comfortable little apartment when you, with your domestic skill, have fitted it up. I selected it because it was out of your world, away from the people you knew, away from the people who knew you. Here we may remain in perfect peace until we've matured our plans. Then we shall go to spend the rest of our happy existence together."

"I repeat that this is the last time I shall ever follow you."

"Pardon me, dearest; had you made that remark before? Indeed I did not hear you," he went on affably; "but as you like. Perhaps I shall not ask you to go farther if you wish otherwise. We may stay right here and the world will never know where we are."

From her inside pocket Zelda drew a long book and tore therefrom a slip. It was a check for

fifty thousand dollars. She handed it across the table to him, saying:

"Leon, here is a check for $50,000, which I shall place in a down-town bank to-day and for which you may call whenever you wish. To it I shall place ten thousand yearly to your credit. Isn't that enough to pay off the old debt between us? Won't you let me live my life for that amount?"

Coming around to her, with a pleased look in his face, he drew the other chair up beside her, placed his knees in it, took her hand in his, looked into her deep eyes, and said coldly, "Almost thou persuadeth me." Then he turned away, with a diabolical laugh.

She controlled herself, still hoping to win him over.

"But, Zelda, dearest," he said. "With fifty thousand we could fly America, go to the Isles of the Sea, and live like lords; with it you could make me a man; I should soon be making our own money, we would change our names, I should be useful in affairs of government, and before we knew it they would have me the popular candidate for a responsible official position in one of the South Sea Islands. When shall we start?"

"I cannot go with you. Here you may be independent, you may have valets, enjoy art, have luxuries, live happily as you once did when you were yourself,—when you had money,—may entertain your friends,—may——"

"Money? money?" he broke in. "With it and without you my sun would turn to darkness. What shall I do with money? 'Tis you, Zelda, all of you I want." He came and caught her in his arms. "You want me to live happily, independent as I once was; I tell you not one minute's happiness had I seen from the time I left you years ago until my eyes rested on you again. Independence would be nothing without you. To have fine homes, luxuries, wealth, and to be loveless, with no child's voice yelling through the halls, with no mother's tender words calling the sweet infant to her,—what happiness could there be in that?"

"But, Leon; have you no humane feelings left? Are your sympathies dead; have you no sense of right? My husband is good to me; he is all in all to me. He loves me; he is true to me,—are you going to shame me before him, must I be a scandal before the world, a hypocrite before my husband? Won't you have compassion? Believe me, I want to be truthful to my husband, to you, to the world. Do you——"

"Huh," he sneered. "You speak of truth. Truth, changeable creature of man's idiotic brain! Where can we find you, among what peoples, in what lands? To what two men do you mean the same, to what two families, to what two countries, to what two nations, to what two races? Because of a truth in New York one would be made governor, for that same truth in Jersey City he would be electrocuted at Trenton. A lie in

Boston is the truth in Capetown; the truth in London is a lie in Pekin. There is no such thing as general truth; every truth is individual; I shall make my lies what I will and call them truths, and you are going to do so because I ask it."

"Leon! are you made of stone? Don't you see my plight? The leaves of my life are white, every page is open for the world's eyes, except one,—and that is as black as the hinges of night, made so by fear, hypocrisy, the want of equal chance, the wish for equal human liberty. Made so. But you are the only person that can interpret that strange, dark page. Leave it unread, Leon! Don't let people know; I have befriended you, don't be an ingrate."

"Silence!" he broke in. "Listen. The fall comes, the swine are turned loose in the woods, through them they roam hunting their food. To an oak they come; the earth beneath it is tiled with acorns,—they eat, their heads always down, always grunting; never looking up to see whence the bounty falls; never ceasing to grunt as the only appreciation of their Giver's kindness.

"Thus is the whole human race,—hogs, ingrates, wanting to seize everything, to give back nothing. And if under the tree of God's bounty we find ourselves, do any of us thank Him, praise Him without a grunt? No. And I,—I could be nothing other than an ingrate when for twenty-five years I have been like Tantalus reaching for that which I wanted, had it at my fingers' tip, yet

never able to seize it, to get it within my grasp?"

"You condemn everything that is good. But men were not born to live the life of brutes," said Zelda.

"Let me see your look of love again, let me look at the world through your eyes of happiness, believe me one of the world's evil-doers who needs your help. Love me because you once did, because you can make me love the world again."

From his pocket he drew a half-pint flask and drank from it with great swallows. A long silence intervened. They did not hear the merry laughter of the children, they could not hear the unbroken sound of roller skates nor the punt of a cheap foot-ball. The silence of the room made it seem as if the world were taking a noon-day nap. They both heard their hearts beating. The dirty stove was getting hot, and the stuffy room grew suddenly warmer. Zelda began to unbutton her coat, but before she knew it she was holding her gloved hand near the stove to warm her fingers, which were strangely cold.

Leon, having noticed her unbuttoning her coat, said affectionately: "That's right, dearest. Take off your coat and be comfortable! although there is as yet no boudoir, you shall have one as soon as you've arranged things tastefully,—we may do very well for a while. Let me assist you."

She said nothing, but she looked straight into his eyes as he stood opposite her.

"How much will you take to lock up in your soul

what you know about me and leave America?"

"I don't know," he replied; "how much will you give me?"

"Every penny that I possess."

"Why be so foolish? With one-hundredth of it you could hire thugs in New York. They could put me out of the way; they probably would never be caught and you never even suspected, so grand and philanthropic a lady."

"I do not want to commit murder."

"But I shall kill your husband, if he longer stands between us. I cannot bear for you, the only object in the world that means anything to me, to give him willingly all your heart and life, while I must take your icy kisses, look at your cold eyes, force caresses upon you, only because I frighten you with my threats of divulging what you'd give all your happiness to keep unknown. If I can get him out of your life, away from your eyes, perhaps then I may return."

"Oh, shameless man,—murderer!" she said, starting back horrified, "of what are you made? Have you no conscience?"

"Ha!" he said coldly, looking at her out of the corner of his bulging, dissipated eyes. "I tell you conscience is a dangerous thing; it makes cowards of men. It makes them fear to avenge a wrong done them, fear to smite back when smitten. Although they know that their own Book says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," they spare the wretch who has ruined their sister, who

terrifies a community, who stands in the way of their happiness,—happiness is life's chief end, by the way,—simply because they fear what fools call conscience,—conscience, which makes them see indescribable monsters at night; which makes them jump at the slightest sound; which burdens their minds until maddened they jump into some swift stream or turn on the gas or take a drink of some poison, or, most thrilling of all, they blow out their idiotic brains." He laughed a triumphant laugh, and stalking over to the back window, looked out upon the great town.

For a while she sat motionless. Then she began to beat her fingers nervously but noiselessly upon the table. Such misery as hers she would have until now believed impossible. She wondered if there was any good anywhere in the world. She knew that she must have some shadows, but must she not have some sunshine, too?

The woman in her wanted to burst into tears; she longed to cry: "Help! help!" The listening world would pity and aid her, but then their curious, exacting, and critical tongues would demand to know the culprit, and could she ever tell?

What to do she did not know—she had tried every possible way she knew to win him over, all with no avail. She had appealed to his sympathies, to his sense of right and wrong; she had offered him her every penny; she had prayed God to change his wicked heart. Her appeal to Leon's sympathy had been scorned, to his sense of justice

had been ridiculed, and her check had been snatched, torn into bits, and flung into the streets.

All this mattered not to him; he wanted her or —nothing.

To have her child, her husband, the world, know that she was a hypocrite, to have them know what she was,—all this was distracting, but to give herself up to this man who, though once brilliant, had now by his sensuality, dissipation, and shamelessness sunk so deep in degradation would have been worse than death.

Calmly and deliberately she arose from the chair and began to put on her coat.

He turned from the window and faced her.

She said in a very determined manner:

"I shall no longer be intimidated by your threats, I shall no longer be humiliated by your unrelenting tongue which snaps at everything good in the world! I have appealed to that which was good in you; have appealed to the friendship that you had for me in childhood, have tried to soften your heart, have offered you every penny I have in the world,—if you would only leave me in peace. All you have refused. Now do what you like, come what may, I'm going to face it all. Your terrorizing me is at an end. Tell them everything; let them know; I do not fear their curses as much as I hate your presence," and she reached for the door to open it but—it was locked.

"A fine piece of emotionalism," said Leon

calmly; "but you must be yourself. Certainly you do not wish people to know that——"

"I tell you it is at an end," she said as her quick eyes discerned the key that he had carelessly laid on the mantel.

She reached for it, but he, seeing her, did the same, and their hands met.

Her defiant manner and the strong liquors that he had been continually drinking angered him. He rushed at her throat as a maddened bull-dog at his opponent, but she, being on the defensive, protected herself. They struggled in each other's grip, against the table, upsetting it, and it fell with a crash.

The strangled cry of "Help! help!!!" was heard, as when one is being choked.

Another crash was heard and then—a double shot from a pistol.

X

At her cry of "Help" the feeble door had been broken down by a strong young red-faced man who fired two shots from his revolver to frighten off Leon, but he, crazed by liquor and his passion, was heedless of them and had to be torn away by the rescuer, who would have used him badly, had not Zelda interfered.

Knowing that unless Leon's requests should be granted he might attempt some violence to her, she had hired a plain clothes man, whom she instructed to follow her closely and to come at once, if she called.

This man now led the way down the dark, dirty stairs, and when they reached the street they all separated. Zelda met many people who eyed her closely because her presence in the neighborhood bespoke something unusual. The regular "East-siders" know every person who regularly comes into and goes out of their boundaries.

Just how long one can endure anxiety, ever-present fear, and worry is uncertain, but one fact is beyond dispute,—these dark mental troubles make themselves startlingly visible by circles under the eyes, by fresh-cut paths around the once perfectly smooth mouth, by the pallidness of the cheek that was once roseate.

These alarming changes in Zelda naturally could not escape the notice of Stanton, nor indeed of any one who had known her prior to Leon's coming.

All the cosmetics in the world and all the beauty-restoring devices could not bring back to Zelda the lustre of her eyes nor cover up her wrinkles. All the suggestions of a skilled nerve specialist, with his rest cures, could not make her stop jumping at the slightest sound.

The only cure for her was to get Leon out of her life and out of her sight, beyond the possibility of his returning.

She had the sympathy of her husband, and of everyone who knew her, for they thought the sudden change in her was due to her unceasing devotion to the "Home" and to her indefatigable efforts in caring for it.

When she returned home that afternoon after the painful experience with Leon, Stanton became more than ever apprehensive of her condition. He postponed his proposed Western trip three days and called in the family physician, who straightway ordered her to bed; and her attempt to show them that there was no cause for their disquietude was ineffectual.

Her husband's gentleness and kindness to her made her trying position all the more bitter. Her conscience tortured her. Her whole life had been one of hypocrisy,—to her husband, to her son, to the world. God! the magnitude of her sins was

beyond calculation. She had transgressed one of the most serious commandments of the decalogue. Why not, she thought, make a clean breast of it and tell Stanton her whole story?

She thought that she might lose her mind and in her ravings tell him everything that weighed so heavily on her heart. Would it be better to tell him while she was sane? No; the chance was too great. As it was she might be for years tortured by Leon and still be able to smile once in a while, but without Stanton, without Adrian, without her work, life would be nothing. If Leon once opened his mouth, she could never hold up her head again.

Stanton, before leaving, pleaded with her that she would not work so hard, and begged her to promise that she would go to the "Home" no more until she felt better.

The rapid approach of Christmas, however, made her forget his cautionings. Since her first Christmas in the district her custom had been to have a great dinner on that day and to distribute little presents to the children. With so much to do, she could not long remain at home inactive.

It was an unusually mild December sun when she started from Clairmont for Newton. Except for the many things suggestive of Yuletide, one might have thought it a May day.

As soon as the daily services were over she started for her regular rounds of inspection. Just inside the doors that led from the corridor of

the main floor to the basement where he had only a short while before met her Leon rose up again, apparently from nowhere.

"We meet again," he said tauntingly.

"I thought," she replied, "that the severe treatment given you in New York had been enough for you."

"Dull scissors do not cut," he said, "they only snag. That brute only sharpened my anger, only made me crave more for my heart's satisfaction; only made you, my earthly goal and heavenly end, loom up brighter and nearer to me."

"Get out of the way that I may pass," she demanded.

"I'll open my arms that you may pass into them, Zelda," he mocked.

"If you touch me, I shall scream for the engineer."

"As you please," he retorted; "but remember that when you scream this time it will be my men who will answer, not yours. Your engineer is not in this building, nor is your watchman. Both are being securely held on the outside. With your own money I have bribed them. Now, ha! ha!" he laughed, "will you yell?"

She realized her danger.

"Why did you come here again to-day?" she asked.

"Why did you leave me in New York? We might have made our plans there and might now be out of the reach of all possible meddlers. I

came to ask you for the last time to go away with me. If you do not go voluntarily, I,"—he spoke with emphasis,—"am going to force you away."

Leon expected that she would fall on her knees and beg his mercy. But he was mistaken, and her self-confidence disconcerted him.

"I'm not going with you, no matter what you do," she said. "I shall face it all. I am going to stay right here with those whom I love and who love me. I'm going to stay with Stanton, with Adrian, with the poor little crippled children,—the homeless, ill-clothed, cold, needy, fatherless, unprotected. I'm not going to turn my face away from the sun of heaven's kindness just because you, a dark shadow, have come back into my life. Do you think that I believe that God in His goodness would let my life of usefulness be wrecked by yours, when you poison every living thing you touch,—I, who nurse His sick, help His poor, feed His hungry, and——"

"Shut up, woman!" he yelled. "You do nothing unselfishly. Why don't you do what you wish because you wish to, because it's in you, because you're human. You're afraid. Napoleon was the nearest to human perfection that ever lived. Why don't you imitate him? He loved with all the human passion of his soul, he spilt human blood, he took human life, but he also had mercy, compassion. He was not always making apologies; he did not have that ever-lurking fear of after-punishment. He saw what he was born to do and

did it, caring not what others thought or did. . . . Oh, Zelda!" and his voice broke, "you belong to me; but you won't give me the hand that pulls one out of the mire."

"Leon," she said sadly, "I want you to do good. I'll help you to do good. I will give you money to go anywhere in the world and act with freedom, without poverty, care, or want, but it must not be near me. If I should act kindly toward you, you would misinterpret my motive. Will you go?"

"Yes; but you must go with me."

"But I said I couldn't go."

"You must."

"I can't; I cannot, I tell you."

"I give you this last chance."

"I'll never leave."

"Then, Zelda, misery is misery. If you fear that you would be miserable with me and won't go, I'm going to make you miserable here. I'm going to make your loving Stanton kick you out as he would a dog; I am going to make your son shrink from you as he would from a leper, calling you a false, lying mother; I'm going to make the kiddies who call you 'Lady Bountiful' call you—I'm going to make the world call you hypocrite, liar. I'm going to tell all I know."

"Stop, Leon, please!" she cried.

"Then will you go?"

"I cannot."

"I'll force you "

He blew a whistle, and before she could turn around she was being taken out bodily by several strong men.

XI

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she mumbled feebly as she was helped up the steps. "Did they kill him,—I mean did they hurt him badly? Will he come back, do you think?" she ran on incoherently, and then said apologetically, "I don't know what I'm saying, but you'll pardon me, won't you? You see the fright quite upset me!"

"Oh, that's all right, madam, I understand, I understand," he said consolingly. "I knows dat little t'ings like dat will make you noivous, but it's all right; it's all right. You see we couldn't figure out dat guy's game. When he'd come in Fitz's joint and buy everybody a drink and den make his git-away we knowed right away that something was wrong somewhere; see? So I frames up and puts me gang on him to watch. We thought he might 'a' been one of de bulls in plain clothes; see? So we always had our peepers open to see when he'd come in; den we seen him go in de 'Home' one day and wondered what dis guy was doing; see? And to-day when we seen him wid a bunch of strange 'boobs' we knows right away dat somethin' was wrong, so I gits on de job and stations me men on all de corners. We watched de auto dat stood out in front of de 'Home,' and when I

seen him rush you out I blows my whistle; see? De way dat guy started off wid dat machine I thought he'd wreck it."

"But how did you ever stop it?" cut in Zelda.

"Oh, all dem guys what does dat kind o' work is afraid, madam. He was fired up with bad rum; see? And 'twas cooling off den, and jest as soon as Dan fired de gun he put on breaks, jumps out, and tries to run for his life; but Dan got him."

"What! you don't mean you killed him?" she inquired, horror-stricken.

"Why, sure; sure," he returned, with a smile, as if he thought the taking of life no more than the taking in of his breath. "What do you t'ink we ought to do wid dem guys what tries to hurt good people,—put crowns on dere heads and make 'em kings? Not on your life. We got 'em all except de leader, and we'll get him, don't worry. Don't be afraid of dat bunch any more, 'cause it's all off wid 'em."

"You won't take them to prison, will you? You see, I—well, my husband,—that is, my son —Oh, what am I saying? I mean that my name would be dragged in court if they were imprisoned, and I shouldn't like that,—because my friends—well, you understand."

"Oh, dat court business is all right, madam. Dey'll never get no nearer de coop den dey are now. I got a third degree dat would make dat one dey have in de court-house seem like a birth-

day card from a near friend, and when we gits through wid 'em in dat dey won't need no sentence from a judge on dis side of de river. We'se jest sorry we didn't get de main guy, but he's in for it; we'll land him yet. Now, I must be going. Good—" and he started away.

"Oh, don't go yet," said Zelda. "Let me thank you again for all that you've done. You've saved my life, for I'm sure they would have killed me, if you had not prevented them. When I came among you to establish my work ten years ago, you remember you saved me then from being torn to pieces by some of your own gang—you remember—and here you have done the same again. Can't I thank you in some other way?"

"Madam, I hope you don't mean to pay me anyt'ing. Yes; I believe I have saved you twice, but dem's de only two things I ever done in my life worth while. I ain't got de fine language to tell you what a wonderful change you've brought into our ward down dere, and I ain't got de soft heart like some people 'cause its been crushed by de mean, cold things I've done. But don't you thank me. Let de little bare-footed kiddies you've shoed and clothed, de mothers you've kept from going wrong, and de fathers dat you gave a boost to,—let dem t'ank me.

"Madam," and he took off his cap and began to twist it somewhat nervously in his hand, "do you know you brought de first ray of light into my life dat I ever seen and dat you brought all

de sunshine and happiness to de little kiddies in our district dat dey ever knowed? When you came in to start I tried to discourage you; I thought I was doing you a favor, for I knowed what had happened to all a' dem dat had been dere before you. Oh, yes, madam, we had had dem missionaries before you come, but they had all come wid messages of gloom,—doom,—and had sent us to hell (excuse me for dat word, madam) before we was yet dead; dey showed us nothing but de black side of life; dey told us we was all mean, had no good in us; dey kept us in a world of blackest night always, and did not even let in de light of de moon, nor even yet a star. You know, madam, people in a district like dat is born in meanness and wid a veil of blackness over dere eyes, and dey don't know dat dere is another side to life, and when missionaries dat are supposed to know and to bring light wid dem and make de dark shadow fade away, when dey come and tell us what we know,—dat we are sinful and all dat stuff,—why we just take it and go ahead and say we're damned (excuse dat word, madam) anyway, so what de use changing; and den after dey had sent our souls to hell dey'd pass around de hat for us to drop in our nickels and to help de cause along, whatever cause dey mean. But it took de loaves of bread out of our kiddies' mouths, so I planned to run all of 'em out dat came in again; but, madam, when you came 'twas different, 'twas all sunshine,

all brightness; you took away nothing, you brought everything; you asked nothing in return, you gave everything.

"We learnt how to laugh; we learnt dat we were not doomed, dat we were not all bad inside of us, but dat we could be good, if we would. We learnt dat being good had its reward, and, madam, I believe dat some of dem down dere now believe 'tis a God. Don't you t'ank me; let dem t'ank me. Don't you know when I t'ink of you I begin to t'ink dat dis world ain't so black as we paint it, or as people like me makes it. I almost wants to turn and go straight when I t'inks of you, but I can't; I been dis way too long. I started dis way. Me father used to take me to de store when I was a kid so high and make me steal 'cause he thought I was little and de storekeeper wouldn't t'ink I knowed any better if I got caught; den he'd make me fight, and den he'd take me in his arms and go down to de corner saloon and buy me a drink, and somebody else would buy me a drink, and he knowed I could not drink it all, so he'd drink de rest hisself. I wa'n't de only kid would be dere either; we'se all gone bad, you see, 'cause we was started off wrong. Yes, I'd like to go straight, but I can't change. Dere's something of de old past dat hangs on to me, holds me, and won't let go.

"Well, I must be going now. Me and O'Reilly's,—you know O'Reilly, de cop,—got a

deal on to-night, and he'll be sore as blazes if I don't be dere at seven when he come on his beat; see? So long, mad—"

"Won't you come in and have dinner?" she interrupted.

"Oh, no, madam, dat's all right and don't fear; we'll git dat head guy all right. So long."

He ran down the steps and jumped into the taxicab, and Zelda went into the house, bewildered with frightful reflections and still more frightful anticipations.

She looked over her mail and found a telegram from Stanton and a letter from Elsie Van Deman wishing her a happy Xmas. The message from Stanton she answered immediately.

She did not dress for dinner,—which had been prepared by Thomas, the butler, as it was Leon's day out,—but went as she was when it was announced.

She ate alone; perhaps it was better so. She sat at the table with her head sidewise resting on her left palm. The bisque was forced down and she merely nibbled at the roast and took no salad nor dessert at all.

Not even the visit from the Brocktons, who were always the most agreeable company, aroused her from heavy gloom. She even welcomed their going,—a thing that she had never before done.

That night in bed she lived over every event in her life, analyzing it and then synthesizing it again.

Each happening of her early years passed like so many gaily colored flowers in a garden,—flowers of indescribable beauty and variety. They passed like slowly moving scenes in a moving picture, ever moving, ever beautiful, each one more attractive than its predecessor. She saw herself a happy child with her mother at Yorktown; she remembered the brave and companionable Leon of her childhood; the school in Mrs. Mark's garret; and she remembered with infinite pleasure even Mrs. Marks herself. Oh, the happiness of childhood!

She remembered with satisfaction the things that she had done for the patients at the hospital; she remembered,—so vividly!—her love and her marriage with Stanton. Oh, the sublimity of a marriage of love!

She remembered how her heart began to swell, how she lived in a world in which there were only Stanton, herself, and her little child that was yet to be born; how she would dress him when he was a month old; what college he should go to, what a great man he would be. She remembered how she had fairly worshipped that baby when they had brought it to her two hours old. Oh, the heavenliness of motherhood!

She remembered the first days of her work at the "Home,"—the disappointments that she had in the beginning, all past now; and those same disappointments now seemed as pearls in the sunshine of her life, for she could see that some one

was being led aright, that some one was deriving benefit from her work. What a joyful satisfaction there is in good works!

And then the scene changed. In the films now are countless devils tormenting the soul of one who would evade them. This horrible picture appears, and there stands not the Leon of childhood, but Leon, morbid, skeptical, tormenting. This picture does not pass on and make way for another as the beautiful ones did. It lingers, it does not even move. Heavens! is the machine out of order, will it never turn from the ghastly Satanic scene?

Her head becomes hot; everything is in a rapid rotary motion. She thinks herself in a room with countless doors of escape, yet whenever she opens one in rushes a fire that would eat up her very soul.

She was sleeping now, and the unforgettable nightmare seemed interminable.

XII

Adrian was alarmed at his thoughts. He had never imagined that at any time in his early life he would have any time for thoughts of sentiment; yet they came now unsummoned. He wished to become a lawyer, and he gave up many pleasures in order to give his time to his studies. He wanted later on to become one of the world's great, to hear his voice in the Senate of the United States, to see his picture in the Temple of Fame. But while he was ambitious he was not avaricious nor heartless. He wanted to meet men who were men, to battle with them, and to win; and nothing seemed to him too great a sacrifice, if he could accomplish this.

He did not play football because he liked it, but because the college honor was involved, and he knew that his playing would bring joy to his fellow students. He tried to keep clear of anything that might stand in the way of his ambition.

He had to acknowledge to himself, however, that Miss Croydon had made a very great impression upon him. He could not put her out of his mind.

He now buried his face in his hands and tried to fix his eyes fast on the cold pages of a scientific

volume; but at the beginning and end of each line his mental eye saw her standing,—sweet, lovely, radiant. She followed each line with him; she went into his brain and helped it interpret the meaning. She said always: "Go on, Adrian. Push forward; I want to help you."

He closed the book to shut out the vision, but he could not.

He did not try to bring her to his mind; she came herself, uninvited, and more and more he was beginning to find that he was welcoming her. Yet he would not be truthful to himself; he liked to think, "I shall be a man of the people; I have no time for love." But even so, the smile on her lips stayed in his eyes; her voice, like music, stayed in his heart.

In the hurrying crowd that between five and seven o'clock comes nightly out of New York going to different towns in Northern New Jersey over the Lackawanna, Adrian was rushing.

He had barely stepped off the ferry in Hoboken when a voice which he immediately recognized said invitingly, "Why don't you save your ticket until the next time?" However much he tried to make himself believe otherwise, he was glad to hear that voice.

He turned, and beside him he saw a dark brown limousine, through the half-open door of which Wanda looked, with a smile.

"Won't you get in?" she asked. And before

Adrian could frame an excuse he was in the car speeding off—he did not know whither.

"I am very glad to see you again, Miss Croydon," he said as he seated himself. "Since I saw you last I have heard enough floral speeches about you to fill a volume of a thousand pages."

"What do you mean?" she asked, the little smile that Adrian remembered so well playing on her lips.

"I mean my fellow students, your admirers, have said the most complimentary things about you that can be said about a woman. They have made you a queen, a goddess; with them you are as lovely as was Diana, and each of them wishes to bow his knees at your shrine."

She laughed a rippling little laugh, for his flattery had pleased her vanity.

"But tell me," he continued, good-humoredly, "where are you taking me, fair abductress? I shall scream for help if you do not tell whither I am being carried."

"I am taking you home."

"Then you are not going to Boonsville?"

"Not to-night."

"Then where?"

"To Clairmont. I shall spend the night there with the Brocktons. What are you doing away from Pemberton to-day?"

"I came to see my father off; he has gone for an extended Western trip."

"Are you sure that was your only reason?"

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked, quietly.

"Oh, I suppose I'll have to say—nothing," she returned evasively, "since your curiosity makes you search for answers."

They were silent for a moment.

"How was the concert?" he asked, breaking the stillness.

"Then you know where I've been!"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You're a personage."

"Don't be enigmatical; I don't understand you."

"Do you suppose, Miss Croydon, that the Cholly Knickerbockers, whose living depends on their social columns in the popular dailies, are going to let you, the prettiest and most talked about out-of-town girl in this vicinity, come into town to a theatre party, dance, or dinner, without giving all society a notification of your intention?"

"Then you knew by the papers?"

"Of course; how else should I know?"

"And you're still sure," she said, with a searching look in her eyes, "that to bid your father good-bye was your sole reason for coming to town to-day?"

"The boys contend that I came for a different purpose," he said, with a merry look in his eyes. "They say that I am selfish because I do not divulge to them your whereabouts, that they might call themselves, even if not invited."

"Oh, Adrian, won't you have done with the boys?" she asked in a pleading tone. "It is of you I want to hear. Let us talk of ourselves. . . . Yes, I have been to the concert at Carnegie Hall to hear Vronski, whom they call, and rightly, I am sure, the greatest living violinist. With his bow he can do wonders. Under its spell one sees the flowers growing and enjoys their perfume, hears the babbling of a limpid stream coursing down a mountain-side in springtime, feels the biting wintry blast, hears the thunder-claps, the rain torrents, the hail, sees the snowflakes falling, and feels the sun's warmth. He makes one understand grief, sorrow, gladness, anger, hate, jealousy, sympathy, mercy, and, greatest of all,—love. In fact, Addie, if I could play as he does, I should whisper my love with my bow, knowing that it could convey my meaning far better than can my weak words. I should whisper my love with my bow and then I should subdue your stubborn heart."

Adrian had not been prepared for such expressions from her, and he regarded them as forward and immodest. Yet, when he dared be truthful with himself he was greatly interested in her, therefore he hesitated before he replied.

If she had smiled perhaps it would have been different, his discomfiture would not have been so great, but her matter of fact manner made it impossible for him to treat lightly what she had said.

To hear her speak of capturing his heart

aroused in him a feeling of pleasing unpleasantness, so when he tried to fence with her he stammered, "I—I'm afraid, Wan—Miss Croydon—"

"Go on, please. Say Wanda as you started and wished to do," she interrupted.

"You have misunderstood me. I am not stubborn and my heart needs neither a master nor a companion; its only love is its hope of success. Before me lies the business of life. I'm trying to realize its seriousness while I am young so that I may go about it properly. I am not sure that I am capable of such sentiments as those that you have spoken to me. I am sure that no one will prove it to me any time soon. My only wish now is to make my life successful. For me everything else is too ephemeral to be considered.

"I must leave affairs of the heart to men who are——"

"Oh, Adrian," she pleaded, tightly pressing his strong gloved hand in her own tiny one. The touch, like an electric current, sent through his being many mingled emotions. "How self-centered you have allowed yourself to become! Do you suppose that God is going to permit you to be different from all the rest of the human type? Do you suppose that He is going to begin with you and create an emotionless race? How can you so misunderstand yourself? God is not experimenting; He knows us all, and making allowances for our individual idiosyncrasies, He

knows that we are all alike,—all directed by the same thing,—love. Warriors bold, gowned monks, cloaked friars, bearded philosophers, all suppressors of their natural feelings,—their age is dead. Do you want to be less human than you are? . . . You say that you cannot love; that is because you do not yet know how to be truthful to yourself. You have thought of everything else except love, and when it wanted your attention you beat it back."

She drew closer to him, and continued:

"Listen, Adrian, I'm going to help you find your real self; I'm going to make you love, love me alone; I'm going to come up to the front door of your heart, ring its bell, and you, when you know yourself better than you do now, are going to open the door to me, welcome me with gladness, with all the joy with which one lover welcomes another. You say you came to New York to-day to bid your father good-bye. How many times he has gone before and you thought nothing of it! You came to New York to-day to see me, but you won't admit it."

"But Wanda, Wanda," he interrupted. "I cannot—" She could hear his heart crying for utterance through his eyes.

"I know you cannot now, Adrian," she waved him aside with a motion of her hand. "I did not ask you to yet. You are yet lost to yourself; you stand in your own light; you hunt for your soul, but Glaucus-like, you have hidden it among

the sea-weeds of your future days, among your hopes of making a mark in life."

"But," he protested stoutly, "I tell you a young man about to start out on life's business has no time for love. It too quickly engulfs him in the marital sea? And then what? All the chances of a possible successful life are hampered. He can never have his freedom any more; his wife cannot hold the high social position that he had dreamed of for her; his child cannot be taken for its morning air in a limousine. Money is scarce—the theatre parties, fine gowns, luxurious homes, are now tumbled air castles. He wants her to be like an elderly society leader whose husband has lived long enough to gather millions. But it cannot be. Because of his masculine pride he does not wish to see her below the other women of their early acquaintance. Then comes an awful moment. To satisfy his pride he steals a little money and then a little more, and still a little; and then, because he is unsuspected, his recklessness makes him steal all the money he can get his hands on. He is caught, tried, convicted. Look, Wand——" he caught himself again as he uttered her first name. "Look at the number of wrecked lives,—his, his wife's, his child's, their aged parents'. Or worse yet, suppose the hasty couple before they have lived together a fortnight agree to separate, on the miserable plea of incompatibility of temperament; or suppose each one, having soon after

their marriage found a soul mate, decides to go his or her own way. These are all mistakes of youth,—blind, impulsive, impatient youth."

"But the pictures you have drawn are absurd pictures. Sensible people marry because they wish to climb together all mountains, to sail together all streams, to bridge together all chasms, to feel together all joys, sorrows, griefs, and disappointments. No, Adrian, you cannot mean what you say. You must know better; there is no incompatibility after marriage that did not exist before. Love is plain, open, kind; it does not deceive, it does not lie hidden. Each soul knows its mate from its birth, and each can find its own in a crowd of millions. Does a mother have to search all through a great gathering of children in order to know the joyful, playful voice of her own? Never! The soul of the mother calls to that of the child, and the soul of the child responds to the call,—so it is with love and marriage. There is no business of life for a man alone. He must make a business for himself and also for the woman of his choice. This kind of business you are going to plan for me."

Just how long their limousine had been standing in front of the Brocktons' fine home in upper Clairmont they did not know, but a servant in livery interrupted their conversation by announcing that Mrs. Brockton was waiting.

Wanda answered in a flurry and they got out.

She bade him good-bye and he walked home, five blocks away.

"Oh, you perfect dear!" said Mrs. Brockton smilingly, as, running downstairs, she caught Wanda in her arms and kissed her on her cheeks.

Mrs. Brockton was a dear woman, turning fifty, with chestnut hair streaked with gray, but her face was still almost that of a girl. In temperament she was everything that one could call kind. About her was an ineffable charm that impressed itself unforgettably on everyone that met her. Nor was she void of the astuteness and the wit that makes one a power in society. She and Wanda's mother had been inseparable companions from their childhood until Mrs. Croydon's death, which occurred when the girl was yet an infant. Mrs. Brockton had then taken care of Wanda until she went to Europe to be educated. And now, although the girl, with a host of servants, lived in the mansion that had been built by her father in Boonsville, she still acknowledged Mrs. Brockton as a foster-mother, which was gratifying to the maternal instinct that was in that good woman's bosom.

They talked cheerfully while Wanda, chilled by the cold air, warmed herself by the open fire, and then she went up to dress for dinner.

There were no guests to dinner that evening, but the conversation was none the less spicy on that account, as Mr. Brockton, a man a score of years older than his wife, remembered very

vividly Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Shenandoah, and in his stories he mingled pathos and comedy with such cleverness that Wanda, radiant in a black dinner gown, felt she had lost some precious jewel if she missed one word from his lips.

Moreover, the pioneer days in the West were still fresh in his mind. He had been a globe-trotter, a great reader, a critic, and withal had had time to gather millions of dollars, so that an hour in his presence was sure to be very instructive as well as most agreeable.

"Why were you so late in coming?" Mrs. Brockton got the opportunity to ask during one of her husband's narratives.

Wanda's eyes could not conceal her gladness when she thought that it was Addie to whom her lateness was due, and while the older woman saw the clear eyes before her dancing like sprites, she could not interpret their meaning, for Wanda replied evasively, giving her ear to Mr. Brockton.

"I wanted to ask a young broker to meet you this evening," Mrs. Brockton said, "but dearie appreciates you so much that he would not hear of it. Wasn't it selfish of him?"

"No," Wanda replied, with a winning little pout on her lips, "I think Daddy's fine; I'd rather listen to him than to any other man I know—except—anyway, someone came with me to your door," and she looked at Mrs. Brockton.

"Who?" asked the foster-mother, with maternal inquisitiveness.

"Call 31-J Clairmont when you have finished dinner, Miss Croydon," interrupted one of the maids.

"That's Stanton Birch's," said Mrs. Brockton in surprise, dropping her fork on the gold and white china, "and he's now in the West."

"It wasn't he; it was——"

"Adrian?"

"Yes."

"Well, precious little girl, why didn't you bring him in? What's he doing away from Pemberton to-day? Here I, idiot that I am, have been trying for three months to arrange a meeting between you and him, and you've outwitted me. You've played my own card from my own hand while I looked at it drowsily, wondering, waiting for the best chance to put it down."

As soon as dinner was over Mrs. Brockton rose from the table and rang up the number that the girl had given Wanda.

Meanwhile Adrian, his dinner over, was sitting with his mother in the library, holding her nervous hand in his own strong one and caressing her filially when a maid called him to the telephone.

"Hello," having taken up the receiver.

"Adrian, I'm not going to like it a bit," came a familiar voice from the other end, "because you didn't come in."

"I couldn't be an intruder," he apologized. "But I'm sor——"

"No apology," she cut him off curtly; "you were right at my door and never came in to say 'Hello!' Now, I want you here in fifteen minutes," she said commandingly; "I'll send the car right down for you."

"But Mother's not well," he pleaded, "and I shouldn't like to leave her alone to-night."

"Then we'll come down there," she answered, knowing how deep was the boy's devotion for his mother.

"You may go, Adrian," put in Zelda, who had heard his part of the conversation; "I shall be quite well alone."

"You eel," said Mrs. Brockton, who heard what the boy's mother said, "you are trying to slip out of my way. But your mother will not permit such neglect."

Turning to his mother, he asked, "Are you sure, Mother, that I may go out for an hour without your missing me?"

"I miss you if you are out a minute, Adrian, but go for a little while; I sha'n't be lonesome."

"Dear Mother," he said, with a voice full of mingled emotions.

"I'm waiting," came over the telephone.

"I'll be up shortly," he returned, and Mrs. Brockton went back to her seat, with a triumphant look on her face.

"Down on your knees, ingrate, and do penance to me for your blunder," Mrs. Brockton said as he came in the door.

"I will, priestess, offer up to thee a bull and an ewe, if thou wilt but attire thyself in a sacerdotal robe, and lead me near a fire to warm my icy hands."

"And now you mock me after having so openly ignored me?"

"Heaven forbid, blessed mother, I ask thy forgiveness in all mercy, humility, meekness," and he, with a smile on his lips, began to stoop as if he were going on his knees.

"Get up," called Wanda from the dim-lighted parlor as he kneeled, "I'll have you going on your knees to no other person but myself."

"Ah," said Adrian, "some unseen hand saves the lamb just as it is about to be offered. A thousand thanks, dear rescuer," he went on smilingly. "My tailor's bill is already far beyond my power to settle it, and another dollar would have been added to it if the knees of my new evening trousers had been mussed on this Persian lamb's wool."

He gave his fur coat, his hat, and his cane to the man at the door, and Mrs. Brockton, leaning on his arm, led him into the parlor.

"How like a priestess every man makes every woman," ventured Mr. Brockton to Adrian, after he had shaken his hand warmly and the young man had greeted Miss Croydon. "To her he

sacrifices everything,—riches, health, time, business, success, soul, love——"

"Stop there," interrupted Wanda. "Adrian," —she took the liberty to call him by his first name even in their presence,—"is not a sentimentalist."

"But he has an eye for a pretty girl and a heart to give her."

"I'd like you to make him believe it," she said.

Adrian changed the subject by speaking of Vronski's concert.

He then asked Wanda to give them some music, and she played one of the latest tangoes after she had executed something more classical, and Adrian could not resist gliding around the room a little with Mrs. Brockton, who was a good dancer.

Later, however, Wanda coaxed Adrian to play, and the older people caught her with her deep, expressive eyes looking down affectionately upon the young man as his fingers ran over the keys.

The Brocktons retired to the library to play cards.

Adrian arose from the piano, and Wanda, seating herself, sang:

"My soul's own, heart of my heart,
Wilt thou in me believe?
Light of my life, if thou depart
From earth, my soul shall leave."

There was a crackling and sizzling of the

dying embers in the old-fashioned fireplace, the light from which cast a soft, dim crimson over the room. The electric lights had not been turned on in the front parlor where they sat.

"I am singing to you," she said, as she ended the song.

"It is useless," he said sadly, raising one of his hands and placing it on the top of the piano as he looked into her face; "I hear but I cannot respond. If there be any lyre-like chord in me which your words strike, it is out of tune; it is like the mother saying caressing words to her babe, which answers only with feeble emotions and incoherent sounds."

"But a child will speak after a while, won't it?" she asked.

"I'm afraid this child will never learn. Oh, Wanda, don't you see how futile must be your attempt; can't you see how barren is the soil in which you are sowing the greatest thing in the world,—love?"

"Adrian, how long will it take you to learn that hearts were not made for time but time for hearts; to learn that all the other great things in the world are the servants of a great thing, —love,—worshipping and adoring it and doing everything to show appreciation of it? No, Adrian, I am a child; I do not know all the great ways in which one person makes another love the more. My arms have not the witchery of an enchantress, my eyes have not the love-

light that glows and fascinates, my tongue does not know honeyed words except to mumble them badly, but I know all that a woman needs to say to a man when she loves him, and that is, 'I love you.' Do not turn away from me, Addie." She pressed her hand on his shoulder while he sat sidewise to her on the revolving stool. "I love you," she reiterated. "They are not new words, Adrian; they were as old as the earth when they were born; they were as old to Eve's ear when Adam told them to her as they are to yours now, but, Adrian, they are the only words in the world that are at once young and old and sweet."

She looked down upon him and her eyes of dark gray seemed in their lustre to float upon the gory rays of light emitted by the fireplace.

They seemed magnetos. Adrian knew that they were focussed upon him, and try as he might to turn from her, he was helpless.

Oh, the sting of eyes like Wanda's!

That of an insect, an animal, a reptile, they are all cured, but the sting of such eyes, striking the innermost recesses of a man's heart, brings both joy and pain to his soul. For it there is but one cure,—it takes the sweetness of love or the bitterness of death to restore life to the person stung.

Wanda did not know the power of her eyes. She was not sure that she had interpreted his feeling aright when his cheeks lit up and he nervously twitched and beat his palms together.

He knew that he must get away from her, if he was to carry out his youthful resolve; he knew just how much beyond the bounds of everything he would go for this adorable girl, for having called whom forward a few hours ago his remorseful conscience now thrashed him. His intelligence now reproved him for having called her bold, because he saw that she was only a natural girl, with a girl's innocent love. He knew that greater strength than that with which he had led a Pemberton team to victory was needed, if he was to put her from him. His determination to win success in life,—everything crumbled before this beautiful girl.

There was a deep silence.

The fire in the fireplace would have seemed as ice if it had been compared with the passionate heat of their hearts.

"I must be going; I shall leave early in the morning for Pemberton," he said, breaking the silence.

"Will you spend an evening with me in Boonsville during the holidays? I sha'n't be away for that season."

"I thank you; I'm afraid, though, of Mother's condition. She is not at all well now, and I shall spend most of my time with her."

"I'm sorry," she said quietly.

He got his hat and coat and was about to open the door.

"May I write you a letter?" she asked.

"You did once," he replied, with a faint smile on his face,—a face that was flushed with youth.

"With very little encouragement to write again, wasn't it?"

He opened the door and made a step forward

"May I write you a letter?" she repeated.

"Wanda, do you not see how hard I am trying not—not to love you," and he was gone.

XIII

"Do you think so, Adrian?"

"I can't say; you see I know so little of art."

"But you have an opinion?"

"Yes; in fact, I think Géricault made wonderfully better horses in oil than our own American Remington did in water color."

"Indeed? What of Bonheur; is she overrated."

"Perhaps not; but Troyon's animals are far more animal-like in their movements than hers. She seemed to forget that animals are beasts."

"You don't like my salad, Wanda," put in Miss Crews, the housekeeper.

"Oh, yes I do," she answered gaily. "It's great, isn't it, Adrian?"

"Splendid," he replied.

"We grew this romaine in our own hot-house and I superintended the planting," added Miss Crews.

"Really, you are a wonderful housekeeper, Miss Crews," he said.

"Do you think I look matronly at the head of a table, Adrian?" asked Wanda.

"You are scarcely old enough to look matronly yet, but why do you ask me?" he returned.

"Alex, some more butter for Mr. Birch, please," she said, changing the subject.

"Have you heard about Caribelle and Guy Hessden?" asked Adrian.

"No; what about them?"

"Suing for divorce."

"You don't mean it. I am so sorry."

"Did I not tell you of it in one of my letters?"

"No; you told me only of your own dear self, and that was all I wanted to hear. But their faces told the world that they were happy; why this sudden break?" asked Wanda.

"My dear girl, many people's faces tell the world that same story; it's a case of 'Laugh and the world laughs with you'."

"How easy it is for people to dissemble. But I cannot understand their case; what is the trouble?" inquired Wanda.

"Oh, the old story,—a bad man and a good woman. But of course they'll never ask for separation on such grounds."

"I'm sorry they are not happy," she said, and her perfect head set straight up on her well-shaped neck.

She looked out of her eyes as a child does when he has gotten hold of a new idea that puzzles him.

"Adrian," she asked suddenly, "wouldn't it be wonderful if all the good people could be put together and all the bad ones put together?"

"Suggest that idea to some novelist."

"Look, your glass is empty," she replied.

"This wine is great, it is as good as some that my father has,—some he bought when he was in Paris on his honeymoon."

"What do you think of the French?" she asked. "Do you think that they are as immoral and insincere and parsimonious as we Americans think they are?"

"Certainly not; they have their own way of doing things, and in many ways they are the best people in the world. Of course, some of their customs seem strange and bad to us because ours are so different."

"I wonder if any race is naturally any worse than all the others."

"I doubt it," he answered.

They arose, and Adrian went into the music room.

"Shall it be the piano of the Victrola?" she asked.

"The Victrola, please."

"Of course; I might have known you wanted to talk to me while it is playing."

"Interpret my thoughts as you like. You're always right, and I shan't protest."

They were silent for a moment while the music was playing,—playing softly, sweetly, plaintively.

"Life is so tiresome in this house," she then said, half seriously.

"Why?" asked Adrian, "You have good serv-

ants, a splendid housekeeper,—everything that you could wish."

"That's it; I do nothing for myself. I don't even lace my own shoes or do my hair. Why, even my breath seems to be drawn for me by some one else. I am as helpless as if I were an invalid. Every moment of my time is filled with—nothing. I get up in the morning, have breakfast, then there is a ride, a morning call, or shopping. After noon I have luncheon, take a nap, go to a concert or a dance, or read a novel. After dinner I go to the opera or a dance, then to bed again. It all seems so purposeless, meaningless, empty."

"But," objected Adrian, "you rebel against the spirit of the age. Don't you know that every other girl would want to pass just that sort of an existence?"

"No, Adrian, you are wrong. The time has passed when women liked to live empty lives."

"Why, then, if it is so empty, don't you get something with which to fill it?"

"There is but one thing that can."

"Get that one thing."

"I'm trying, but it is hard. Adrian, I know what you must think of me; I know what people would think of me because of my actions toward you; they would call me a bold, forward girl. I'm not. I differ from all the others only in that I express fearlessly and unconventionally what every girl feels and would say to the person who has awakened her love, if she were not afraid. Let

their glib tongues rattle, let them talk. I get more pleasure in saying that I love you than garrulous people can ever get in calling me bold.

"Why do men set aflame the soul of a woman? They have not the power to put out the fire, yet they chide her because she herself cannot put it out. I speak as I do because I love you; you would say as much to me were you honest with yourself."

"Wanda, won't you understand that I want to make a start first; I want to see that before me lies a possibility of getting on."

"Oh yes, I know; you want to be great. And I want you to be great, Adrian. But I want to help make you so; I want to go down into the quarry of life and help you dig the rough stones; I want to hand you the water to cool your parching tongue while you dig them out; I want to help you build the great stone steps that lead to greatness; I want to climb them with you; and, when they're finished I want to sit on the top step with you, not because of the little I've done, but because you are there and I should be with you.

"Why don't you tell me how you feel and have done with it? You smoke your pipe; in your every revery, in every little ring of smoke that you blow heavenward, I am in the center; you build your air castles, and in each castle it is I you see darting through its halls and rooms."

He looked at her. Her girlish beauty was exquisite; her candor admirable. She was the most

adorable thing he had ever seen. He struggled with the swelling emotions in him,—emotions that would have leaped out, had his will been less strong.

He said: "I cannot do as you wish, Wanda. I must sever sentiment wholly from my actions for a long while yet. To say that I love you would mean that I should like to marry you now. Marriage for me could not mean anything without children, and some one has truly said that 'he that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune, for they are impediments to great enterprises.'

"You see, Wanda, I am on my way now to success; I can do big things better alone. I won't let you enter this race. I'm going to use all my strength to keep away from love for a while. But I do love——"

"Oh, go on, Adrian, go on." Her face lit up and she clapped her hands buoyantly. "You've said almost all I wanted you to say. You have almost made a confession; you almost see your own soul. It is better to tell your feelings to a statue or a picture than to let them stay in you and smother. You could not stop death, were it at hand. You know that death and love are alike,—unchangeable. They will not be denied—nor can they be hidden. Tell me the truth. Why shouldn't you? Do you think it shames me to talk to you as I do? It does not. To say 'I love you' is the truest thing I've ever said. It is the

only thing that sounds absolutely true to my own ears.

"I'm going to battle hard, Adrian, and I'm going to win, not so much on my own account, but because you want me to, because you want me to go into your soul and let you look into it through me; because you need me as a mirror reflecting your own dear good self to you. You may discourage me, but you cannot stop me."

Adrian could stand no more. To attempt to repel the dynamic force of emotion then seeking recognition in his heart would have been impossible. To deceive himself further or to whip his feelings into servitude, when they were demanding their freedom, was a thing he could no longer do.

In a moment of ecstasy he unconsciously sprang to his feet, caught her in his arms, and kissed her warm lips fervently.

"Wanda! Wanda!" he said. "You do me injustice; you wrong me, you wound me terribly, girl, when you say that I discourage you. Oh, won't you forgive me, dearest? I did not mean to do so. I thought all of myself; in me was all I, I, I, forgetting the greatest of all truths, that no life on earth is a single life, that somewhere in the world is the counterpart of every heart. I knew you were mine; I knew it unmistakably as soon as I first saw you, but I could see no one else in myself but myself, no one entering but the thoughts, the hopes of my future life. I fought to keep my thoughts so filled, dearest, but you had

a greater weapon,—love. And you battled with me in my own territory and won! Won. And oh how glad I am! how glad! . . . You say I think you bold, forward. How could you think that, Wanda? To me you are the purest thing in all the world. Had angels been copied after you, heaven would have been no less perfect. Wanda, won't you forgive me?"

She looked up at him, her cheeks flushing, her eyes glistening like stars in the youth of the night, and around her lips played a smile that would have wooed all the world to happiness.

"Oh, Adrian," she said ecstatically, "how good and strong you are! Surely this is heaven. Such happiness is not known on earth. Hold me tight, tighter in your big strong arms; press me closer to your strong warm heart. Can we not go through life loving each other like this, Adrian?"

"That is what we shall do, dearest," he answered.

"But it will be so long before we start," she said sadly.

"Do you remember what I said to you at the Howell dance about engagements?"

"How could I forget? I remember every word you've ever spoken to me since we met."

"What then, little girl, did I say?"

"You said," she turned her head thoughtfully, for a moment—"Oh, you said that if you ever kissed me, we would be engaged, and——"

"I have kissed you to-night."

"And you said that you did not believe in long engagements,—that we must be married very soon after our engagement. What a dear boy you are! Now come sit down by me and we shall set a date for our——" She hummed Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," her hand tightly held in his, while they sat and looked into each other's eyes.

"Now, when shall it be? I won't be put off long, you know."

"No, dearest, I'm not going to keep you off long. Do you not know that I'm madder, more passionately in love with you than you are with me?"

"Nonsense, Adrian, impossible. When shall it be?"

"In June, dearest, when they hand me my diploma."

"Think," she said with childish glee, "think! you will have two commencements at once."

"Yes; but you will be the biggest diploma I shall ever get."

"June. June. Wasn't heaven kind to give us such a month with its beautiful warm, kind days? It is all so wonderful. You know, Adrian, I have pictured our little home in the country—I could never stand the city—with honeysuckles entwining its front, its yard filled with roses, the fragrance of which we shall get on the soft winds of the morning and evening, and in the back a little garden, dearest, all our own, from which I shall with my own hands pull vegetables for you. I

don't want luxury, I was born with that curse. I want to live simply, to laugh, to hear my own voice, to be like people who are happy. I want a house where there are not servants to talk over our loving each other, and to call us mad because I am mad about you; a house where I myself can make your coffee and muffins for you in the morning and broil the steak for your dinner. How lovely, how blissful it will all be, Adrian," and she leaned over against him and pressed her glowing cheeks to his.

"That will be heaven, dearest. You have built up a wonderful home for us, but did you not leave out the one important thing?"

"What?" she asked, somewhat puzzled.

"Think."

"I cannot. What?"

"The nursery, dearest."

"Oh no, I could never have forgotten that. It shall be the first room in the draught for the house. And then when some sweet little voice comes to fill up the room how proud I shall be. We shall stand together in the door, Adrian, and watch her tear up her little dolls and see her as she tries to read the Mother Goose stories. She will run in and tell me, 'Mother, Dada's coming.' Oh, won't it be heavenly! How will it sound to hear me say to her, 'No, dearest; you must not do that, Dada wouldn't like it.'"

"It's going to sound perfectly natural and sweet coming from your lips, Wanda," he said.

"But, Adrian, we have not seen her yet. What

will she be like? I will tell you. She shall have your kind eyes, and your dark hair, but my lips, don't you think? Oh, vain woman that I am! I don't care, we are all vain when we get the man we love. Yes, my lips and nose and cheeks, and as she grows I shall teach her oh the nicest things. But when she grows up she is not going to be one of those women that kill in them what should be most alive. I hate Hedda Gablers. She will be one of those warm, loving, sensible, self-subjecting Judiths such as Keller—isn't it, Adrian?—portrays in 'Green Henry.' And she must——"

"Miss Wanda," called a voice from the hall, "it's your bed time."

"Thank you, Miss Crews," Wanda replied. "You see," she continued, "I'm twenty, and still a child. I must have some one to put me to bed. From this time forth I shall obey no one but Adrian Birch.

"Will it not be better for you to obey Miss Crews sometimes? She has known you from your birth and knows what's best for you."

"Yes; but I have some discretion, and do you forget that I am to be Mrs. Adrian Birch soon?"

"How can I forget it? Are you happy, dearest?"

"Beyond words. Your vacation began to-day. How long have you?"

"Twelve days."

"How lovely!"

"Yes, I shall come up every day if I can. But you see my mother is——"

"Stop there, Adrian. Our mother, if you please. How I shall love to call some one mother; I never knew my own."

"But she is far from well," Adrian continued, "and I shall be a great deal with her."

"Why mayn't I come down sometimes too?" Wanda asked.

"You may, and you shall; but you'd better go to bed now before you're called again."

"Do you command me to go or is it a request?"

"I shall be your lover, not your sovereign," he replied.

"At any rate, I obey. . . . I hope you will sleep well," said Wanda, as they parted on the stairs.

"I'm sure I shall; I am so happy," he replied.

XIV

The morning after her dreadful experience Zelda arose at seven. Not one minute's peaceful sleep had she had during the night. That uncanny, diabolical picture had tormented her relentlessly.

She wondered if it would not have been better if Leon and his gang had been successful in taking her away—she knew not where. The world then would never have known the truth,—would never have known that her whole life had been a lie. No future torture could possibly be as great as the pain she now endured.

Death to her was nothing; it is to no one. The fire in her mind was infinitely hotter than that of the inferno. She did not even think of trying to escape.

Her only thought was: "Was it best that I was rescued from those potential murderers?"

Had she been killed, all her acquaintances would have proclaimed her a brave, courageous, charitable woman, but now if they knew, if they only knew what she really was,—what a confusion of tongues there would be, heaping upon her the vilest epithets in the English language.

The looking-glass did not lie to her—mirrors

are not flatterers. It showed her herself as she really was.

There were her blood-shot, tired eyes, her swollen and drooping lids, her colorless cheeks, her drawn lips. Try as she might, she could not escape the close scrutiny of Anne, who would have commented on her mistress' looks had not Zelda avoided her.

She had no appetite for breakfast. As soon as it was over she went about her usual duty, watering her flowers in the conservatory; but she did not have sufficient strength to finish it.

From the parlor window she gazed out. What beautiful, what ugly, what courageous, what cowardly thoughts ran through her mind!

To-day was December the twenty-second,—the anniversary of her marriage. Twenty-three years ago she had stood in the Fifth Avenue house in Stanton's arms. That moment was the moment of her whole life.

Stanton would soon be coming now, and Adrian, dear Adrian, too. She would see him every day for the twelve days of his holiday. Did these thoughts bring happiness? Scarcely. Stanton was far away in the West; suppose he didn't come? That could never be; he had never been away on one of their anniversaries. He would be home soon, and good, loving, tender Stanton would bring, as he always did, some token of his devotion. No, they never had anniversary receptions, but they never forgot that day. Yes, he would be sure

to come. She wondered if he thought that she had forgotten the day. But that was too impossible even to be considered. Of course he knew that she could never forget that day.

But she knew that Leon had escaped from her rescuers—that he was in the kitchen. Her coffee had told her that. No one made coffee like Leon, not even André.

"Good morning," said Leon blandly.

"Had you really the boldness to come into my house again after yesterday?" she asked.

"How can a man change his last day? Oaks don't break, they don't even bend after they are full grown."

"Leave me or I'll call the servants," she said, astonished at her own calmness.

"They will not hear; they're far up-stairs. Why, Zelda, they could not injure me. I'm in love, and love is greater than death. I once saw a duel between love and death. They each had weapons of equal quality and size. The battle was hot, but love conquered. So with me. I cannot stop now; I love you."

He ran to her and seized her. She struggled to free herself, but without success.

"Come on, come on; kiss me," he said. "There is sweetness in the cruelty of your words, warmth in the iciness of your eyes, a power in your unresponsive lips. I would rather die because of your cruelty than live resting my head on the pillow of a queen. You cannot stop me."

He did not hear the opening of the door. His passion had crazed him.

"Zelda! Zelda!" called Stanton's familiar voice, while he and Adrian took off their coats in the hall.

But no response was heard.

Stanton turned to his right and he would not, could not believe his eyes. An old-fashioned mirror showed him Leon with his arms around Zelda, who was struggling to get away.

Enraged, he rushed at Leon. He seized him by the throat and tore him away from Zelda, and would have struck him with his cane, if she had not shrieked, "Don't strike." Leon wrung himself away and the lick went wild.

"That woman's a nigger!" he yelled, pointing to Zelda.

For those words Stanton would have killed him, if he had not been for the moment robbed of his strength. He tried to raise his arm, but it was limp.

Zelda had fallen on the floor.

Leon's words were playing games in Stanton's brain.

"Say that again and die," he said feebly, and Leon repeated with energy, "That woman's a nigger!"

"Tell him he lies, Zelda,—my own dear Zelda. It's calumny, he's defaming you, dear," he said, still weak from the shock. "Tell him he lies. I know you're not, but I want to hear it from your

own sweet lips, Zelda. . . . Zelda, this maddens me, dear; tell him he lies," he pleaded.

She caught his words but scarcely understood their meaning.

"Tell him he lies," urged Stanton.

"I cannot," she whispered. "It is true."

Like lightning his strength came back.

"You hell-cat!" he shouted, fire leaping from his eyes, his body swelling. "Let me tear you in shreds."

Lion-like he sprang toward her.

As he touched her Adrian checked him.

"Stop! You're wild; do you intend murder, Father?" he said coldly. "I'm surprised, I'm ashamed of you."

"Ashamed! Surprised!" yelled Stanton. "She is a deceiver, an adventuress; let me strangle her to death. That woman is a negro," and he sprang toward her again.

"That woman is my mother," said Adrian warmly, "and you shall not hurt her. See what this fellow says. . . . Now you," turning to Leon. "What is this?"

Leon was very pale, he even looked penitent.

"It is true," he said slowly. "But she is blameless. I am the guilty one; let me bear the burden. Kill me. I am not the Leon you call me, I am Clarence Williamson, the Williamson that was the machine in the State of ———— for years. I am the Williamson that had fought from the bottom and succeeded; the Williamson that people

were proud of and respected; I am he who tried to act honorably toward every one, but circumstances turned against me."

"You act honorably!" thundered Stanton. "You damned, common hound."

"Yes," went on Leon, "I'm a common hound now, but once I was a thoroughbred, I had blue blood; I made the world know me. I was a success and then some snake in the grass told them that I was a 'nigger.'

"Then, of course, that ended all. Power went, friends went, the world turned against me, but still I struggled on until I found that Zelda was your wife. Then I changed; everything changed me. I cared for nothing but a chance to get even. The world kicked me and called me dog. I barked back at it; but my strength was gone and it no longer feared my bites. Then I set out to find Zelda at all costs and tear her away from you. I went back to my old trade,—cooking, —which had been my support while I struggled through college. I found her, but she would not leave you. She is as innocent as a spring flower. I say no more." He drank something from a small bottle. "The pain of a thousand years' suffering cuts loose my heart strings."

He dropped, and when Adrian looked at him he was dead.

"Mother, Mother," begged Adrian, "is this true? Tell me, Mother. Am I a ——"

"You she-devil!" shouted Stanton viciously.

"Cleopatra was a goddess beside you. I could uproot your very——"

"Tell me, Mother; is it true?" persisted Adrian, as someone groping in the dark.

She struggled to her feet and collected herself as well as she could, supported by Adrian.

"Yes," she said almost inaudibly. "I will tell you all; I will open the unread page in my life; it is black,—not with sin but because of misfortune.

"I was born in Virginia, the illegitimate—yes, illegitimate; does that word shock you?—child of John Marston, as his last will up-stairs will tell you.

"My mother, a beautiful mulatto, had been a house girl of his in the days of slavery. When liberation came he retained and supported her until my birth. After that she refused his aid and gave her life for me.

"Leon and I were children together; went to school together. I never knew fully that I was a ——— until my mother was dying.

"I wanted to get on in the world. But the fact that I was a ——— put the world against me. But I had the white man's brain and beauty, and I wanted a chance to live,—an equal chance.

"Why let my ability atrophy because I was black?

"There is more moral in telling one lie in order to live decently, to live as God would have us live, than there is in all the world's truth, if that truth leaves one a vagabond, a beggar, surrounded by

squalor. Stanton, I longed to be *somebody*.

"So I went to school and to work. I wanted to get on. I worked at the hospital and proved my ability.

"Then you came, Stanton,—though you despise me, let me call you Stanton still; I shall call you that through all eternity,—you came and with you a new world with everything in it new.

"I loved you when I heard your groans. I slept not a wink for three days while you were at the hospital. I knew that if I would live myself, I must bring you back to life. You got better; you took me to your home. You got well. When I would have left you would not let me. I could have gone then and lived out my own sad life; but you asked me to marry you. I told you my life was black, but you would not hear it; you said you loved me better than the world. I believed that here was my opportunity. Do people cut their own throats when chances of success come? To do so would not be human; why should you expect it of me? We were married. Even then I might have gone, but our boy, Adrian, came,—a tie to bind us the more closely together. How could I leave a heaven like this? You became sick again, and I made you live because I knew you, trusted you, and loved you better than you will ever know.

"Our boy grew; we loved him. I thought the only person who knew my past was dead, or, if not, I hoped I should die without ever seeing him again. But some uncontrollable hand was against

me; I saw myself doomed; I could not help myself. Why should I leave all that I love, all that I have in this world?

"When we sat at the table three months ago I asked you what you thought of miscegenation. I shall not repeat your answer; you remember. I do not hold you to that answer. My end must come. 'Tis at hand. I ask no mercy. I do not ask you to let me love you; you cannot stop that, even though you make atoms of my body. Do as you like. I ask no mercy."

She dropped her head and fell limp in Adrian's arms. He put her in an old-fashioned chair.

"You see, father," said Adrian, almost heartbroken.

"She lies!" shouted Stanton angrily.

"Uncompromising man! Your heart is going to make you rue those words. You feel you have been duped, it is true. But wait."

"She lies," he repeated. "She does not know how to love; she is a traitress."

"Father, how can you say such things after all she has gone through for you? After she has spent sleepless nights; been your slave; given you me, made you the most comfortable and happy man alive. You're not yourself now or else you could not say such things. If what she has gone through and done for you do not prove love, what then is love? You feel that you have been tricked, but it isn't that that hurts you. You now hate a color, not a soul.

"I tell you, dear father, the only thing in all the world worth while is love. It is the only smile from God's own lips that imprints itself ineradicably on man's heart and returns again to God; it is the only human thing that is unchangeable, unchanging, and unchanged. And yet—And yet—"

His voice broke; he dropped his eyes to the floor, then raised his head and began again.

"See, Father, she loves you. Take her and forget. In her love for you she is no different now from what she was before you knew."

"Take her, you say! Do you suppose I'm going to be made the laughing-stock of society. She is not my kind—she's different," said Stanton.

"Yes, she is different because society says so, not because her soul is different. I tell you that every life that is ushered into this world comes from one pure undefiled source of love and purity. We are not conceived in iniquity; anger, envy, hate, jealousy, are the qualities that men give to themselves. The soul itself comes into the world with one predominating attitude,—love for man and love for God.

"See, Father, those two little children in the driveway. Look how they play; the black one is the son of the cook; the white one, the son of a man of millions. In their voices, in their actions toward each other, there is no discord. Children see deeper into the love of human beings than men do; they do not mistake appearances for realities; shadows cannot deceive them. See how they play!

All the bliss of heaven is in their little hearts now. Let them go on this way; let society not meddle with them and they will live endlessly in that same happiness in which you now see them.

"I say that hate between man and man is not natural. But children are taught 'Nigger, nigger, never die; black face and shiny eye!' in their nurseries; they are taught 'Eeni, m-ee-ni-mi-ny mo, catch a nigger by his toe' in their games at school. Such epithets as 'Alligator bait,' 'Shine,' 'Snowball,' 'Chocolate-drop,' 'Coffee,' 'Nigger Heaven,' they learn when they are young men. This is the hate that is put into them; it is not inborn. You cannot build up a world of love with color as its basis. Love is not that sort of thing."

"Ah!" protested Stanton, with a wave of his hand, "I was tricked into this. Do you think I could mix my pure blood with common stock?"

"We're all here in one land," began Adrian, "some of pure, some of hybrid stock. One would not get rid of the other if he could. I tell you fearlessly that it is as impossible to keep us apart as it is to keep a white rooster, no matter how pure, from being the father of a black hen's chicken, if they be in the same lot. Attraction does not always work along a line of sameness. Love brings hearts together and love knows no law. And are people happier, are they morally better, when kept apart by such legislation? No one knows, Father. Take her again and forget. You said you would always act in the light of law, love, and God.

Prove it, if you be true to yourself, for you love her better than your life, and when your fury ceases, you will acknowledge that you do."

"Do you propose to drive me into further making a fool of myself, into further disgust and abasement, by such maudlin sentimentality. I'm Stanton Birch. It cannot be. I am done."

"Adrian! Adrian!" cried Zelda, "is Stanton leaving me? . . . This is judgment, isn't it, Adrian? There is no more life, is there? Is not everything at an end? Stanton's leaving me? Is not everything at an end?"

XV

"The last Will and Testament of Col. John Marston. To whom it may concern.

"Be it hereby known that I, John Marston, of James City County, Virginia, direct descendant of a founder and promoter of the London Company, grandson of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, do bequeath my entire savings deposited in the bank at Williamsburg, Virginia, and my farm of four hundred and fifty (450) acres in James City County to Zelda, the daughter of Cathering Edwards and myself.

"I loved her mother more than she could ever know, but between us there was a gap which prevented my marrying her.

"In her life time I would have helped her, but her pride scorned it. I would have given anything to my child Zelda, though born out of wedlock, but she too refused my aid, which hurt me beyond words.

"She is married and happy now. May she ever be!

"She cannot refuse my last request. If she does, I shall never know it.

"Zelda is my own blood,—all that is left of me. I hope she will ever be happy and remember me as one who loved her."

This will had been signed by Colonel Marston and was undoubtedly valid.

"You see, Father," said Adrian, after the bequest to Zelda was read, "she has good blood in her veins."

But Stanton was inflexible.

"No pleadings will move me," he responded. "It's all over. I shall leave."

"Yes; but how? What will people say to this abrupt separation when they know that you and Mother have been so happy for years? What will she do?"

"I shall leave her well cared for. No one shall ever know."

"But," protested Adrian, insulted, "she does not want your money."

"You must go with me, Adrian. You are the only care in my life now; you belong to me."

"And what of the part of me that belongs to Mother?"

"You're my son," shouted Stanton irritably.

"And she's your wife," responded Adrian, with equal force.

"Then you refuse to go with me?"

"Yes; unless we all go. You are moved by unjust hate; you think the thoughts of fifty years ago, mine are of to-day, newer thoughts," he said passionately. "My blood is redder blood, redder blood,—the corpuscles of which are not hate, envy,

prejudice, but respect and kind feeling for others."

"How can you be such a fool, Adrian?"

"I'm going to stay here with my mother, Father. I'm going into the world and work to bring back to her some of the peace and happiness that should be hers."

XVI

A hungry, ragged loafer sat upon a bench in a park. His thick and matted hair, his unshaven face, the rags that hung about him, made him a loathsome sight. Not even a fellow loafer would sit by him. But he had not been like this always. He despised all life; everything to him was contemptible. He had made for himself a world, and everything in it was wretched, base, abject. He wished himself dead.

Of a sudden on a near-by track rushed madly a train. He caught faint glimpses of the faces in it. To him they all seemed to be laughing and happy. The train disappeared and he said, "Why can't I be as happy as they all are, and bound for some definite station? . . . I am no good. Why doesn't the end come?"

He continued to sit in the park, still despising, still cursing life.

An hour later he roused himself, picked up a newspaper,—an extra,—that had been dropped by some passer-by, and read the headlines:

"TRAIN DERAILED! ALL KILLED."

It was the train that he had seen. At once he

exclaimed, "How glad I am that I was not on it!"

Inconsistent man! You rejoice over that very thing,—life,—which an hour before you called useless, the thing that you wished to rid yourself of.

Fool! they were not all happy on that train. Some of them were as glad to get out of their misery as you would be! Many of them, fearing other methods of ending life, might have even then been praying that such a thing might happen.

But trains! trains! What is each life but a train running slowly or rapidly upon rails of chance? Some running on time; others always late; some reaching their stations, other never getting there. How can one tell when his engineer has the complete mastery of his machinery? How often are we derailed and wrecked by such robbers as disappointment and sorrow; by such brigands as calamity and misfortune, even when our definite stations seem in view!

Adrian felt himself as complete a wreck as did that loafer; his plans were scattered, his hopes deadened, everything worth while was gone,—irrevocably lost—as he thought.

For him this had always been the greatest season,—Christmas,—when everybody was happy, when his mother and father usually seemed even happier than ever. But now what a change!

Whatever he did now, some one must be wounded. Gracious! what a distracting thought!

His mother he knew he loved with an immeasur-

able devotion; to him she was the dearest mother that heaven had ever sent. How she had watched him when young; what care she had taken of him; what interest she had shown in all his affairs! How she had inspired him!

His father too he reverenced. His allegiance to him was unbreakable. Had he not been to him everything that a father could be?

And then Wanda! A few hours before he had held her in his arms, and they had both been transcended into beatific joy. The night before the passion for her, which he had been so long suppressing, had burst out like a volcano, and they had planned to go through life together in perfect harmony.

How different now!

Heavens! How much trouble life can bring all of a sudden to a human being!

Through his mind ran millions of distracting and maddening thoughts, each one as indistinct, as enigmatical, yet as full of foreboding as the world's most profound mystery.

He saw nothing as a whole,—each thought began, then chopped itself off in the middle, as coherent as the tail of a horse joined to the head of a rhinoceros. But through it all there ever appeared one face, the sweetest of all. How long must he endure such torture!

Poor Wanda!

She must know the truth. All was over between them. To say that it was over was the same to

him as saying, "This is my heart, I'll crush it, and go through life dead, before my end comes."

But she must know, and he must tell her. But how?

To tell her that he was a ——— Could he ever say such a word to her and watch all that had before been dear to him become transformed into deadly disgust?

"Ingrate! ingrate! that I am," he thought. "Wanda would never think such things. She is too pure, too loving. She can never change."

Stop. She can change; she may not. All life changes, all human beings change. You thought right at first. Do not make the thousands of years of experience of human beings a lie because of this one girl.

Along the street he walked aimlessly, knowing not whither he was going, and he would not have cared, if he had known.

Nothing would have made any impression on him now. He neither heard, nor felt, nor saw anything about him.

He continued to wander aimlessly.

Two hours later he found himself, almost stupefied, ringing Wanda's door-bell.

A servant showed him into the parlor and announced his presence to Wanda.

She did not stop to wonder why he had returned so soon after having left her only a few hours before. She was too glad for that.

Into the room she rushed, buoyant, radiant,

smiling, dressed, with the exception of her cloak, for an afternoon call.

Throwing her arms about him and kissing him, she said gleefully: "How glad I am that you have returned so soon, dearest. I shall not make my call, and we may remain at home together, unless you will go with me."

"No, no, Wanda, you must make your call. I shall be going shortly," said Adrian.

"Nonsense. You shall be here for the rest of the afternoon."

"No, please, Wanda; I just came to say one thing and then I must go, perhaps forever."

Alarmed, she turned and looked at him. What could he mean by those words, "Go forever?"

She noticed how troubled he was. She could see that there was something hurting him beyond words, something that he must tell her. She was frightened.

"Why, dearie, what do you mean?" she inquired, tremulously.

"Wanda," he said, his head down, and plainly in agony, "it's all over between us."

The blood rushed to her face. The blow had struck her like some powerful engine. How beautiful her flushing skin appeared to him now as she stood so that he looked her full in the face as she raised his head. Her cheeks showed all her girlish youth and charm.

Stammering, she said: "Don't jest, Adrian; I cannot stand it, even from you, about so heavenly,

so sacred a thing. Surely you don't know what you're saying."

"I wish it were a jest," he said. "Perhaps then I too could smile at it."

"Was he serious?" thought Wanda. "Why should he choose such a subject to play with?" Their bond had been fastened so short a while before; why should he come back to say such things?"

Every moment was increasing her fear. Harder and harder she tried to control herself.

Through Adrian's mind ran all the great things that he would have done twenty years hence. How happy he would have made her, how blissful their lives would have been! Now all is wrecked. He sees as he thinks the end of the love of this adorable girl. If the end be now, he will at least tell her that he loves her better than life, and then he will go out of her life forever perhaps.

She came to him and wrapped herself in his arms, smiling, half fearfully. "Come, Adrian, the joke's at an end now. You've enjoyed it enough."

He looked into her face. What a perfect contour, what lips, what eyes, what hair! Her beauty and his love for her maddened him. He pressed her to him and said passionately:

"O Wanda, Wanda, the things I've planned, the big things I've planned, for you, for us both, are at an end; but, dearest, at the thought of losing you, I have but one overwhelming desire,—to have God take my soul to Him. The thought of losing

you makes me wish, by my own hand, to send my soul to heaven, to find out if there is there greater bliss, greater happiness in loving and being loved; or to hell, to find out if there is there greater sorrow, greater misery in loving and not being loved. I cannot let you go, Wanda, for——"

His words had reassured her. To know that he loved her was all she cared for.

"But, Adrian," she cut him off, "you are not going to lose me. You could not, if you wished to; for I would not let you. Why do you think such things?"

"Oh! I know that I am, Wanda; I know that you're going away from me."

He pressed her close to him, and suddenly he remembered the scene that had so recently taken place in his own home, remembered that he was different from her. He would apologize for thus letting his passions rule him, tell her what he was, and go.

He dropped his arms from her, and said, "I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?" asked Wanda. "Sorry because you have held me and made me happy, because you have kissed me? Is it not your right? Am I not yours? Why then are you sorry? For what are you sorry?" she asked, greatly puzzled.

"Because I kissed you. Wanda, there is a difference between us. I have come to tell you that you are done with me."

"What can you mean any way, Adrian?" she

asked, with despairing emphasis. "You have spoken in riddles ever since you came. What does it mean?"

"It means that we are dead to each other."

His face became white, he moved nervously, over him ran hot and cold waves. No one could have seemed or been more miserable. To give up such a prize would have caused the world to weep.

"Wanda, Wan——" he choked.

She caught him again and held him tight and kissed him. "Yes, Addie. Say it, what is it? What is it?"

"Wanda,—I am a Negro," he stammered.

His confession had in it unerring conviction. To have him repeat it would have been useless.

She thrust him from her as one would drop a burning metal.

There was fire in her every breath. She was furious. She had been fooled; she had laid bare her heart, her soul to this thing.

"You leper!" she burst out. "You cancer in a man's form, you imp let loose from limbo! You deceived me. Acid-like you ate into my pure soul, knowing all the time what you were, knowing that you were as black as midnight. Let me wipe away your kisses, let me tear my flesh from my frame. I was pure; your black skin has corrupted me, polluted me. Get out of my sight forever." She fell exhausted on a chair.

Adrian made no protests. He wished to explain nothing. He had been honest with himself and

with her. No remorse could now come to him for his actions. Compunctions of conscience would not whip him for what he did not do. His only regrets would be his heartaches because of his love for her.

He went into the hall, took down his coat, and started to open the door.

But Wanda's burst of hatred had passed. She saw him going out—saw herself losing him forever.

She knew if he went away from her, her life went too. She knew that she loved him, whatever he was.

She rushed to him as he opened the door and pulled him back.

"Adrian; Adrian," she said, as she caught him, "forgive me, dearest. It was not I speaking to you, calling you those bad names. Not your Wanda whom you love and who loves you more than life. It was the voice of Hate that has come down to me through a thousand years. Forgive me, dearest, won't you? Won't you, Adrian? I know you will. . . . Whatever you are, you are mine, have always been, shall ever be. When out of the void God hurled the earth he started your soul and mine together, knowing that somewhere on this globe we should meet to be forever with each other. In order that we might be, one paradise was corrupted, wars have been fought, the high seas crossed, new lands found and settled. I say you're mine, Adrian,—mine; mine. If you do not believe it, look on God's eternal book and

there you will see written in indelible ink the names Adrian Birch and Wanda Croydon."

She hung like a vine to him.

He freed himself from her and said cooly: "It cannot be, Wanda. We are not for each other. Even your church and your laws are against it."

"The church, the law?" she retorted hotly. "I don't want a church, I don't want a law that would rob me of my life."

"A Protestant cannot marry a Catholic," said Wanda; "the church forbids; a Jewess cannot marry a Gentile; religion forbids: a Negro cannot marry a white person; law and prejudice forbid. Here in fastidious America if a millionaire marries his typist, his friends stand aghast and howl, 'Thou fool!' In more cultured Europe, a duke marrying a peasant loses his dukedom. How silly is it all.

"The very thing over which the church should rejoice, Adrian, the only God-created thing which has not been defiled, polluted, desecrated,—love, —they cast out as one would poison. Oh God! how beautiful and wonderful is the world you made! Is it to be robbed of its goodness by weak human beings?"

"I say it can never be, Wanda. You would not be happy. You could not mingle with your kind. Society would make you an outcast, would ostracize you. You would be like——"

"Because I love you, because God made my

life that it might be yours, because society says that you're a ——, I must climb around the edges of the world, thrust from its center, away from its business, out of its critical eyes, alone and an outcast. All right, Adrian; let it be so. The farther we are away from them, the more I shall have you to myself."

"We can never know each other perfectly, Wanda, could never get into each other's souls. Thousands of years of training have made us different. In me there is something Negroid that you could never understand, in you there is something Caucasian that I could never fully understand and know. We could never get into each other's souls!"

"Look here, Adrian," she said, taking up a beautiful piece of coral from the Bahaman waters, "see the coral; is it not beautiful? Look at its varied colors, how clear it is? What harmony in it all? It is composed of millions and millions of cells, and, Adrian, none of them can get into the other, but what a beautiful whole they make! No little atom, no little seed, no great tree, no animal, no man can ever quite understand another. When God spins each out from himself he gives each a selfhood into which no other self can ever get perfectly, into which He cannot even get himself and be Himself. But what a wonderful piece of work is it all! How all his creation does work together! . . . You can understand, can know me as well as any one on earth; you're going to

know me. You've got to, Adrian. You're mine, I say,—mine. If you let these things on earth keep you from me, you shall have to answer for them in your last day, for in heaven we are married, we're one. No matter what the world says."

He was unbending, not because he did not love her, but because he distrusted himself.

"We must live apart, dearest; I cannot ruin your life because mine is ruined."

"Adrian!" she burst out, inexpressibly distressed.

"They say, Wanda, that the offspring of a quagga and a mare will have its mark,—will be striped. . . . Some people call me a quagga."

He turned and quickly opened the door and rushed out.

"Adrian, Adrian! don't go, don't leave me!" she moaned in a frantic sob as the door slammed.

XVII

A year had passed since Stanton left Zelda. Immediately after the separation Stanton complained of some malady, and said that he would take a long trip abroad, which he hoped would make him himself again.

He traveled in Europe and Asia and Egypt; he visited galleries, cathedrals, museums, seeking everywhere a rest for his mind. He attended the great receptions given by his European and American friends. He walked on the various boulevards, went to the operas, the music halls, hoping to see beautiful women or something that would divert him.

But did he find satisfaction in any of these things? He often stopped and asked himself, "For what am I looking?"

The answer was always the same.

When he went into the various galleries, when he sat at the operas, he had with him only a part of himself. The other part,—well, he did not acknowledge this even to himself.

"Why don't I go back and get the thing that I want most in life?" he at length asked himself numberless times a day. "Why don't I get

that which will complete me; I am myself, but only in part; why don't I become whole again?"

So far as the world knew, he and Zelda were still the loving couple that they had always been. "Why, then, do I not go back?" he asked himself.

He was not afraid of people; he was not afraid of Zelda. His love was too deep for that, and love knows no fear.

He sought his own happiness, and whatever others thought or said mattered little to him. He wanted happiness, whatever the cost.

That he was just in his breaking away from Zelda as he had done, he could find no reason to doubt. He had been deceived, grossly deceived.

One night he sat in his room in a fashionable district in Brussels. He was greatly depressed. His mind was not in the room. It rested on nothing in particular but reviewed his whole life. He cast his eyes upward and midway on one of the walls hung a Madonna. How sweet her face; how adorable she was! Her pure soul, her kind face lent light, beauty, radiance to the room. He admired her dark hair, her pretty eyes, her rounded cheeks, and how she adored the child in her arms.

He was not sure whether it was Zelda as he had known her or whether it was she as some great master had caught her and put her on canvas centuries before she had come into his life.

It brought him back so many thoughts, it seemed so real to him that he stood before it placing one hand on it. He seemed to hear his own voice saying: "Zelda! Zelda! I was crazed. Would all the world be enough to repay you for my mad act if I could offer it to you?

"From the time I left you, it has been your face, your soul which I have followed and which has followed me everywhere. In the wilds, on the sea, on the mountain summit, in the cities, in the night, in the morning, in the day, in the cold, in the warm,—it was always you that led me,—and followed me.

"I cannot get enough of the sight of you.

"I see you as I did the morning when I awoke from my unconsciousness, as I saw you when you were married in my arms, when we were both so happy.

"I see you, Zelda, as I did the morning when I left you, not knowing then what I was doing. This picture hurts worst of all. I hear your voice as you asked if I was leaving. How I love this picture of you! About it is something so humanly divine. From your head even in your misery there seems to radiate a light that would save the world.

"Do you remember, dearest, when I sang the little song,—"My love, my life, my all in all,"—after I had revived you from the faint? I never knew the meaning of those words then. Oh! that I might sing them to you now.

"My voice is broken, so is my heart; but to tell you that 'My love is like a love divine' would make them both whole again.

"Our boy was right. Love is the only thing in the world worth while. It is God's greatest gift to men.

"I am crazed, Zelda,—crazed. I am coming to you. You love me yet, don't you? I believe you do. I shall find out.

"Call me what you may. Call me worse names than I did you. Let others do the same, if they will. Names do not hurt. I have no feeling now which is vulnerable to the world. Only you can hurt or heal. I am coming to you. Do or say what you will."

Zelda had kept on with her charity work. She got great satisfaction out of knowing that she was helping others. She left Clairmont and went to live in a small house near a large city in Northern New Jersey. Her visits in society now were very infrequent. She went only enough to keep from being interrogated whenever she might chance to meet one of her former associates.

She had often felt far greater desire for Stanton than he had for her, perhaps. But to her now he was gone forever.

Now and then in the foreign columns of the papers she would see his name. What pangs of sorrow they would cost her, if only a few words were mentioned about him. Yet she was happy

because he was happy, and she thought he was from what she read. She could still sit alone and call him "Dear good Stanton," and love him as she had always done.

She wished him back, but in vain. She would still carry her broken heart within her and smile at the little children and other people whom she met.

One evening in early March, about fifteen months after their separation, Zelda sat at the piano in her small home, playing softly an old favorite of hers and Stanton's. The wind blew fearfully outside, as it often does in March, and drove the heavy drops of rain down at a terrific gait.

Suddenly the bell rang, but she paid no attention to it. Her one servant,—she kept but one now,—answered the ring.

She heard two people talking in subdued tones in the hall, and waited for a few minutes for the servant to announce the visitor, but she did not.

The visitor had asked the servant to direct him to Zelda, assuring her that no harm would be done.

The suspense irritated Zelda, and she arose from the piano to come to the hall and find out who had called. She made a few steps forward and was about to step from the parlor door into the hall when the visitor turned to go into the room where she was.

At the entrance they met.

He seized her in his arms and said, "Zelda! Zelda! dearest!!"

"Are we to live again, Stanton?" she asked.